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WILLIAM BLAKE'S POETRY AND ENGRAVINGS

by

Louise Henrietta Borchers

(B.S. in Education, Boston University, 1929)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1935

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WILLIAM BLAKE'S POETRY AND ENGRAVINGS

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Foreword

Although Blake never stated which poems and engravings illustrate the various stages of his mysticism, I have made an attempt in this paper to classify these stages as they appear both in his engravings and in his poems. The author is indebted to Professor Mather for the help and inspiration given in the classification of the poems and to Professor Bailey for assistance rendered in the classification of the engravings.

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WILLIAM BLAKE'S POETRY AND ENGRAVINGS

William Blake created art in two realms of human effort. He wrote poetry and engraved pictures. Of these two activities, we shall endeavor to make a careful study to better understand the poet and the engraver.

William Blake used poetry and engraving as agents to express the vital unceasing search of his spirit for the ultimate truth. His symbolism, the method of his search for the truth, is elaborate; it extends through production after production, and we must deal with it. To bring a fair understanding to the study of his poetry and to his engravings we must consider not only the method of this mystic (for with Evelyn Underhill one would readily agree that William Blake was a mystic[1]), but we must learn his meaning of mysticism, its characteristics or stages, and we must learn the use he has made of mysticism in his poetry and in his engravings.

Besides the element of mysticism there are three other elements which we must study if we would know the true Blake. There are the element of Romanticism, the element of emotion, and the element of technique. If we have a fair knowledge of these four, we ought to get a fairly broad picture of Blake's poetry and engravings. We ought really to know the man, Blake.

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1. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poetry of William Blake. p. 18

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1. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poetry of William Blake, p. 12

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I

THE ELEMENT OF MYSTICISM

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Its Meaning

Mysticism is the experience or ecstasy of those who claim to attain insight in vision or sense of absorption in, or union with the divine spirit or the Ultimate Being. A mystic, according to Evelyn Underhill, is the type that in seeking Truth follows the paths of love, beauty, pain, and religion, to "find through them, the revelation of the Ultimate and to experience in them their communion, the Spiritual Reality, the source and the goal of all truth."[1] The mystic is one who pushes the search for Absolute Truth from theory to practice, to include "the experiences of religion, of beauty, of love of pain, as ways to lead to the finding of the Ultimate and to the communion with that Ultimate."[1] The mystic denies that possible knowledge is to be limited by sense, or by a process of "intellectation" or by the unfolding of normal consciousness. Rather is it that the will of the mystic is united with the emotion in an ardent desire to transcend the sense world, to know and commune with the eternal object of love. This passion so irradiates the personality that it creates a distinct type of man or woman. The mystic is unworldly, caring not at all for the adulation of men, the comforts and luxuries of physical existence; he

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1. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poetry of William Blake, p. 13

is sensitive emotionally to the exalted values of life, for he loves all high and holy things which might open to him the experience of the Eternal Reality.

The mystic's plane of spirit is the home of all his efforts either in external manifestation or in contemplative life. If it is true that every artist must be somewhat of a mystic, then the spark of intuition which dwells within him must imbue him with the desire for expression, and through his expression some concept or some thought of truth - some fragment of loveliness - may be presented to other human souls. Absorbed in this realm of intuitional Reality, he denies all of the world and all of its sense report to seek and to know the truth.

William Blake most appropriately says he sees "through" not "with the eye." He is justified in saying it, for in the quiet of contemplation he endeavors to pierce through all the externals of human experience to the meaning beyond. To sense report is added all the processes of logical reasoning, analyzing, comparing, classifying, or theorizing of principles. "But these activities are only a small province of knowledge and a launching point in truth, for launching into the Infinite."[1]

Near to this goal are the experiences of religion, of

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pain, of pleasure, of beauty, and of love. All these states of consciousness in which emotions are awakened may be pre-eminently passive. For art is created; thus is the soul in tune with the rhythm of the All-seeking, to execute itself in outward manifestation. Again Blake says that nothing is pleasing to God except, the "Glad invention of beautiful and exalted things."[1]

Its Characteristics

Having a little better understanding of the meaning of mysticism and having noted the effect it has upon the life of the artist, it might be well to study the characteristics or stages of mysticism, so we may better understand the experiences the artist is having as he travels from one stage to the other along the mystic way. Summarizing the experiences of many mystics, Evelyn Underhill finds there are seven of these stages of the soul progress. They are: the awakening - the purgation - the illumination - rapture - the dark night of the soul - surrender - and the Unitive Life. Each one of these stages will now be taken up in turn and treated separately. "The Awakening" is the first stage; it will be considered first.

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1. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poetry of William Blake, p. 15

The Awakening of the Soul.

An infant in the normal unfolding of consciousness learns to know itself; he feels his needs, and acts to satisfy them. The center of the child's world is himself.

But soon in the development of the individual comes the realization that there is a world of other things and other people about him with its own desires and needs. The individual becomes a social being and very soon the social consciousness begins to modify the character of the individual. In the mystic, this process is intensified, for the plane upon which his emergence takes place is not that of the human or the material, but is the direct revelation of the Absolute. This realization of the Ultimate Reality breaks the first barrier of the self in the perception of something beyond its circle of impulse and activity. "In giving this vision, it impresses the subject of the wide gulf between. The result is an oscillation between pleasure at the contemplation of the divine, and pain - at the disparity between self and the vision."[1] There must be more than an acceptance of the revelations, when one enters upon the mystic way - there must be an active relation set up between self and the vision. When one is about to enter the Mystic Way the Presence sends a direct appeal or gives a commission. This

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individual touch arouses the heroic love, for the Divine enkindles a high purpose, and the will becomes active and dominant. Man is conscious of his Sonship to God and immediately is stirred to live and act according to the relation.

The Purification of the Soul.

Then purgation begins - the second stage. Into life enters a new criterion. "A divine plumb-line is dropped into the tiny circle of individual existence and the period of self knowledge begins."[1] Previously the sense recorded only finitude; now Infinity breaks upon it and its limitations are clearly perceived. The mystic with courage undertakes the task of purification. With eyes steadfast on the Object of Love, it is a joy and a delight to him to deny himself and to overcome all desires. All his energies are unified on the higher center and the acts of self-denial and self-sacrifice are only natural. The world and its trappings is perceived as temporal, limited, illusory; it becomes the soul's business to free itself from all domination of the earthly sense.

The Illumination.

The third step - one partially attained by many artists is that of illumination. This stage is the normal outcome

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1. Underhill, Evelyn, Mysticism, p. 240-245

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Then purgation begins - the second stage. Into life enters a new criterion. "A divine plumb-line is dropped into the tiny circle of individual existence and the period of self knowledge begins."[1] Irrevocably the sense recorded only finitude; now infinity breaks upon it and its limitations are clearly perceived. The mystic with courage undertakes the task of purification. With eyes steadfast on the object of love, it is a joy and a delight to him to deny himself and to overcome all desires. All his energies are unified on the higher center and the acts of self-denial and self-sacrifice are only natural. The world and its trappings is perceived as temporal, limited, illusory; it becomes the soul's business to free itself from all domination of the earthly sense.

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of the preceding two experiences, that of awakening and that of purgation. There is an initiation into the knowledge of the inner plan of life and the universe. The soul beholds the fountain of life; it perceives the Light that is the source of all light. There comes the realization of a God-centered cosmos supplanting all the illusions of a self-centered world. The eyes of the spirit are opened inwards toward the immortality of the soul and the powers of perception are exalted until they are able to perceive messages of this higher degree of reality. These messages of the higher degree of reality become the fruit of this period of the Mystic Way. It depends upon the recipient of these messages just what is the measure of illumination that results. Those who drink deeply, as did Blake, gain the power of looking long into the abyss of Infinite Divinity. Temporarily, the mind of the recipient of messages is unified on this plane, having endured the purgation and having attained a consciousness of Divine Truth. The disposition, the capacity of the individual will now determine the depth and richness of this consciousness. The country of the soul wherein the mystic enjoys his wanderings is Bethlehem, but even here he isn't at the end of his journey for the Mystic Way leads on to Calvary. There are, throughout this entire period of illumination, spiritual visitants, visions, automatic conveying of messages, periods of ecstasy and rapture. The mystic claims that man may test the validity of his visions and his voices by the way

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they enhance his life. Another test is that of seeing how near the vision draws the heart of God. The suspension of all surface interests or distractions and the centering of all the mind and heart in a devout and complete gazing into the heart of God will bring about a state of humility and a state of receptivity - a necessary condition for the inpourings of the all - so that the union may finally be consummated.

Rapture and Ecstasy.

"While the foregoing states - the visions and the messages - are carefully sought, in rapture the self is swept liberally by the Ineffable and caught in very truth in the cloud of glory."[1] The ecstasy is the pure intellectual vision of the great and good God, for the purpose of communicating high and noble thoughts. The mind at this stage forgets itself completely - the experience fore-shadowing the Ultimate Unitive Life when the soul passes into God. This process contributes greatly to the goal of the Mystic Way - that of Deification.[2]

The Dark Night of the Soul.

Then there comes the dark night of the soul. The plane of ecstasy has brought on psychic fatigue and psychologi-

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1. Underhill, Evelyn, Mysticism, p. 288
2. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poetry of William Blake, p. 21

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reaction. There is, too, a realization that the way leads far beyond and to attain the Ultimate means to descend to the depths again to consummate the complete purity needed.

The Surrender.

Often there is a withdrawal on the part of God to test the ability of the person to arouse himself to seek Him anew. This calls for a surrender or the sixth step of the way, a time when old centers of consciousness are obliterated and the new are substituted. Self or the individual is completely abandoned so that Divinity may be established in the person. Then the soul is bowed in utter acquiescence to the purposes of God.[1]

The Unitive Life.

The abandon of the individual initiates the Unitive Life, the time when the Soul is bowed to utter acquiescence to the will of God. This Unitive Life is a life filled with service. The previous stages have been quiet, solitary, contemplative. This final stage brings out the intuitive and practical abilities within the subject; the mystic at this stage is now free to describe his experiences. The new activity gives more material for our examination. The personalities

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absorbed in part from the Absolute, though returning to live in the world of practicality are not of it. The source of their life (two personalities) springs from levels unrelated to common humanity and elusive to all its standards and rules. This task of making contact with two levels of existence, the human and the Absolute, is difficult, for the mystic has a recourse to dangerous symbolism, characterizing the experience as Deification. By "Deification" is meant the transmutation of the self in God, or as spiritual marriage - the union of the soul with God. The true mystic claims his absolute Sonship to God here and now, for he has conformed himself to the various tests of Sonship; he has passed through the seven stages of the Mystic Way.

The Part Mysticism Plays in Blake's Poetry

Mysticism has seven stages. Blake's theory of mysticism had seven stages but the stages vary a trifle. Blake changed the original stages to suit his own manner of thinking and believing. From the mysticism of Swedenborg, he developed a Blakean mysticism which began with the state of innocence rather than with a state of awakening. He felt that the innocence of youth must have a place in the scheme of things, for he believed that intuition which told youth all things was important and necessary. His poems from the "Songs of Innocence" reveal his feelings concerning it.

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<u>The Part Mysticism Plays in Blake's Poetry</u>

Mysticism has seven stages. Blake's theory of mysticism had seven stages but the stages vary a little. Blake changed the original stages to suit his own manner of thinking and believing. From the mysticism of Swedenborg, he developed a Blakean mysticism which began with the state of innocence rather than with a state of awakening. He felt that the innocence of youth must have a place in the scheme of things, for he believed that intuition which told youth all things was important and necessary. His poems from the "Songs of Innocence" reveal his feelings concerning it.

Following the stage of innocence, is the stage of awakening wherein inspiration takes the place of innocence. A contrast is brought out between the innocence of the "Songs of Innocence" and the inspiration of the "Songs of Experience."

The awakening stage is followed by the stage of experience wherein the codes of reason darken the understanding of men. A contrast is made between reason and inspiration, Blake decrying the scientists and the educators, while affirming faith in the imagination and intuition of the soul.

The stage of experience found in the "Songs of Experience" is followed by the purgation, which in turn is followed by the illumination stage, the dark night of the soul, and the Unitive Life. After the stage of experience Blake clings more closely to the theories of mysticism as they have been imparted by Evelyn Underhill.

Blake started at the age of four seeing fairies and witnessing fairy funerals in his imagination. At the age of twelve he was hearing God's voice. Later he was known to have spoken to Ezekiel and to Socrates. In these early stages of youth Blake might not have been called precociously mystical. But in later years he had adopted a close communion with God. His youthful mysticism was a naturalistic mysticism in which he felt a love for flowers, birds, and other living things; it lacked self control which was to destroy self. His later mysticism was a spiritual mysticism wherein self was

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given up entirely toward a fusion with the Ineffable Being. It is strange how throughout the various stages of Blake's mysticism one gets no hint of Christian mysticism, which involves self-denial and self-negation. Blake denies himself no physical needs to achieve his goal. He has food, clothing, and shelter; his utter lack of responsibility in life seemed to secure for him a more rapid spiritual happiness. Even though we get no hint of a Christian mysticism anywhere in Blake, we do know he believed in a spiritual mysticism. For this spiritual mysticism he never tried to find an explanation, for he thought a deep faith and a trust was all that was necessary. These he had. He expresses this faith in these words:

> "Nor is it possible to thought
> A greater than itself to know."[1]

From this spiritual mysticism of Swedenborg Blake developed a mysticism of his own which began with a state of innocence rather than with a state of awakening. Let us note in what poems this stage of innocence exists.

The Part the Stage of Innocence Plays in Blake's Poetry.

The first expression of Blake's spirit of innocence appeared in his "Poetical Sketches" which were written when he was twenty-one years old. He has little to offer other than

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 80

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From this spiritual mysticism or awareness Blake developed a mysticism in his own world begun with a state of innocence rather than with a state of awareness. Let us note in what sense this state of innocence exists.

The Part Two State of Innocence Plays in Blake's Poetry.

The first expression of Blake's spirit of innocence appeared in his "Poetical Sketches" which were written when he was twenty-two years old. He was little to offer other than

1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 80

the spirit of innocence, for our inquiry, for this volume contains his descriptive poems and his songs of lighter vein. The second impression lies in "The Songs of Innocence" which were written twelve years later. These give his character in true sincerity. They are simple and spontaneous poems yet we find in them the glad ecstasy of a child awakening to the glory of the world with a beautiful faith in loveliness. We ourselves can recollect the time when our feet never tired of investigating the mysteries that lay beyond each rise of the meadowland. Then we accepted the world without suspicion of its troubles. What sorrows came to us disturbed only the surface of things and passed away "like little ripples down a sunny river."[1] In just the same way the world seems entirely happy to the newly initiated mystic. Intuition tells him all things; he reasons little more than does a child. Innocence is free; it needs no laws. It is happy since it is unsophisticated. When trouble comes to others, it is ready with the completest sympathy though without understanding. All help each other, as the glow-worm lights the way for the lost emmet. When wolves break in on the sheep, the lions are there to guard the slain lambs in the immortal home. The only God is Christ, the kind Father to whom children were always dearest. It need not be only children who can enjoy such a state. Any person who has not undergone an embittering

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1. Damon, S. Foster, William Blake-His Philosophy and Symbols, Chap. VI, p. 39

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1. Dawson, S. Foster, William Blake-His Philosophy and Symbols, Chap. VI, p. 39

contact with the world is yet innocent and may enjoy with Blake such a state of innocence as we find in those exquisite gems which by name are called "The Lamb", "Infant Joy", "The Chimney Sweeper", and "The Little Black Boy".

A deeper note of mystical experience is felt in "The Divine Image" wherein Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love are the human qualities that reveal God in man and they are also the bases for mutual understanding. Allow me to quote:

"For Mercy has a human heart;
Pity a human face;
And Love, the human form divine:
And Peace, the human dress.

. . . . .

"And all must love the human form,
In heathen Turk or Jew
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling, too."

How like a mystic for Blake to have God himself (in the form of vapour) guide the boy who was lost in the poem called the "Little Boy Lost"! These are his words:

"The mire was deep and the child did sweep,
And away the vapour flew."[1]

<u>The Part that The Awakening Plays in Blake's Poetry</u>.

In Blake's later childhood, he began to feel the presence of God. It seemed as if God had been a "personality thrown out of the world of Eternity into his world of innocence

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1. Yeats, W. B., <u>Poems of William Blake</u>, p. 52

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1. Yeats, W. B., <u>Poems of William Blake</u>, p. 82

to appear there for an instant and then return to his own true dwelling-place."[1] This spiritual dwelling place of God which Blake visited was so real to him that his poetry echoes its mysteries and portrays its characteristics.

The child has now grown older. No longer is he innocent. The restrictions of law, imposed in the name of reason, begin to bring sorrow to him. There is built a wall that begins to dull perception, but the spirit may still free itself from the shadow of a jealous law. Blake true to his glad awakening in the mystic way, points to a "deliverance from this shadow of the law through a faithful following of instinct and divine liberal impulse."[2] Inspiration from now on, shall do the work of innocence.

If we turn to "The Songs of Experience" we shall see that Blake pictures the two contrary states through which the soul must pass. When Blake speaks on his title page of "contrary states of the human soul" he is using the word 'contrary' in a general sense. He assures us that neither state - innocence or experience - "has the force to change the other, that all things are holy and that nature is infinite."[3] But some one may ask, what are these two contrary states. He may mean those "contrary states of heaven

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1. Berger, Blake, Poet and Mystic, Chap. I
2. Swinburne, A. C., Life of William Blake, p. 128
3. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poetry of William Blake, p. 31

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1. Berger, Blake, Poet and Mystic, Chap. I
2. Swinburne, A. C., Life of William Blake, p. 128
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and of hell" or "reason and energy" which, when "married", result in progress. Beeching says, "Blake represented 'love' in his 'Songs of Innocence' and 'hate' in his 'Songs of Experience'.[1] Beeching continues by saying that Blake deals in his "Songs of Experience" with the evil passions he intends as pictures of states as equally necessary states to human progress as those states of love and joy described in "Songs of Innocence." Blake's object in writing these "Songs of Innocence" was to set forth and impress upon children the idea of true religion, while, in his "Songs of Experience", to expose for the sake of their elders, its common counterfeit. These contrasts are presented in a most imaginative and a most delightful way, never in a didactic way.

The Contrasts as Brought Out in the Poems of "Songs of Innocence and Experience."

These feelings of true religion and their opposites may be illustrated in the following ways. Take for example "The Clod and the Pebble", a poem containing two contrasted ideas of love, the unselfish in the first stanza bringing true happiness and the selfish in the third stanza bringing unhappiness:

> "Love seeketh not itself to please,
> Nor for itself hath any care
> But for another gives its ease,
> And builds a heaven in hell's despair.

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1. Ker, W. P., Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, Vol. III, Chap. VII, pp. 143-144

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"So sung a little clod of clay,
Trodden with the cattle's feet,
But a pebble of the brook
Warbled out these metres meet:

"Love seeketh only self to please,
To bind another to its delight
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a hell in heaven's despite."

"The Nurse's Song" in "Songs of Experience" is contrasted with the one by the same name in "Songs of Innocence." The genuine affection of a true nurse in the latter is quite the contrary to the selfish jealousy of the nurse in the former, who is masquerading under a cloak of solicitude.[1] We note this difference in such words as these from "The Songs of Innocence":

"When the voices of children are heard
on the green,
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast,
And everything else is still."

While in the "Songs of Experience" we hear

"When the voices of children are heard
on the green,
And whisperings are in the dale,
The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,
My face turns green and pale."

As "The Chimney Sweeper" and "Holy Thursday" in "The Songs of Innocence" illustrate for children the divine virtue of pity, in their parallels from "The Songs of Experience" we find a stern rebuke to such of their elders as think it an ordinance of the creator, that their foul chimneys should be swept by

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1. Ker, W. P., Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, Vol. III, Chap. VII, p. 145

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little boys and that joyless asylums should herd together unfortunate orphans.[1]

While from the parallels in "The Songs of Experience" we hear this rebuke:

"And because I am happy and dance and
sing,
They think they have done me no
injury,
And are gone to praise God and His
priest and king,
Who make up a heaven of our misery."

. . . . . .

"Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land,-
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?"

It is interesting to note the contrast between "The Lamb" and "The Tiger". In "The Lamb" we learn how Blake felt about the world when he was quite young. In "The Tiger" he is five years older and we no longer find love and beauty in common life, but quite the reverse. This feeling is the result of knowing both the good and evil.[2] Or might one interpret the contrast as being a type of a new heaven on earth in the first and nature "red in tooth and claw"[3] in the second? There is no question but that the tiger gains in sublimity from contrast with the lamb. The poem reaches its sublime moment in these words:

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1. Ker, W. P., Essays and Studies, Vol. III, Chap. VII, p. 145
2. Brooke-Stopford, Studies in Poetry, p. 22
3. Ker, W. P., Essays and Studies, Vol. III, Chap. VII, p. 146 (by Beeching)

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Babes reduced to misery,
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It is interesting to note the contrast between "The Lamb" and "The Tiger". In "The Lamb" we learn how Blake felt about the world when he was quite young. In "The Tiger" he is five years older and we no longer find love and beauty in common life, but quite the reverse. This feeling is the result of knowing both the good and evil.[2] Or might one interpret the contrast as being a type of a new heaven on earth in the first and nature "red in tooth and claw"[3] in the second? There is no question but that the tiger gains in sublimity from contrast with the lamb. The poem reaches its sublime moment in these words:

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1. Ker, W. P., Essays and Studies, Vol. III, Chap. VII, p. 146
2. Brooke-Stopford, Studies in Poetry, p. 22
3. Ker, W. P., Essays and Studies, Vol. III, Chap. VII, p. 146
(by Searching)

"When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb, make thee?"[1]

In "The Chimney Sweeper" the contrary states are shown in these lines from "The Songs of Innocence":

"And the angel told Tom, if he'd be a
good boy,
He'd have God for his father, and never
want joy."

In "Holy Thursday" we note this reaction:

"Oh, what a multitude they seemed, these
flowers of London town!
Seated in companies they sit, with
radiance all their own."

The Part the Stage of Experience Plays in Blake's Poetry.

Soon in this period of the awakening in the Mystic Way there comes a realization that these reasonable codes of law darken the understanding, and that the spirit becomes encased in the mundane shell. This is the essence of the lyric, "To Tirzah" in these lines:

"Whatever is born of mortal birth
Must be consumed with the earth,
To rise from generation free:
Then what have I to do with thee?"[2]

The reasonable code of orthodox law troubles Blake. He cannot see the justice in burning a child at the stake because he has expressed himself freely. The child had ad-

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 74
2. Ibid., p. 84

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mitted a truth as he saw it in these words:

"And Father, how can I love you
Or any of my brothers more?
I love you like the little bird
That picks up crumbs around the
door."[1]

Because the boy had spoken out of his own heart, the priest,

".....burn'd him in a holy place
Where many had been burn'd before:
The weeping parents wept in vain,
Are such things done on Albion's
shore?"[1]

The priest had him burned because the free glad instinct of spirit must be oppressed by accepted opinion and iron law. The same thought is expressed in "I saw a chapel all of gold", in which the chapel is a symbol of a sacred untouchable religious code, so holy, "none did dare to enter in."[2] Again in "Infant Sorrow"[3] we find the curse of religious law imposed by the priesthood.

In this stage of awakening Blake brings out a contrast he sees between reason and inspiration.

The Contrast Between Reason and Inspiration. Blake questions the validity of Reason as compared to Divine Inspiration; he affirms the truth of Imagination and the limitation of the deliberative faculty, reason. Besides decrying the material science of Locke and Newton, Blake attacks the nature philosophies of Rousseau and

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2. Rossetti, W. M., William Blake's Poetical Works, p. 110
3. Ibid., p. 115

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3. Ibid., p. 118

Voltaire by proclaiming that all the physical world, its life and its laws when set up as gods are blinding to spiritual understanding. He says in these words:

"Mock on, mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau;
Mock on, mock on; 'tis all in vain!
You throw the sand against the wind,
And the wind blows it back again."

"The Atoms of Democritus
And Newton's Particles of Light
Are sands upon the Red Sea shore,
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright."[1]

Herein the grain of sand is a symbol of the universe, the wind is the breath of God or of Poetic Genius; Israel is the camp of the Blessed of the Lord.

It is interesting to note that Blake's three stages of the Mystic Way as he sees them are found in the one poem called "Auguries of Innocence."[2] In this poem are found visions of innocence and of experience, and the affirmation of Blake's faith in imagination and in intuition. Innocence has the power:

"To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour."

Experience discloses that:

"Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine."[3]

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1. Rossetti, William M., Poetical Works of William Blake, p. 133
2. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 171
3. Rossetti, William M., Pickering MS., p. 171

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2. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 171
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The affirmation of faith in imagination, the heavenly intuition of the soul, is found in the last lines of the poem. They read:

> "We are led to believe a lie
> When we see not thro' the eye,
> Which was born in a night to perish
> in a night,
> When the soul slept in beams of light.
> God appears, and God is light;
> To those poor souls who dwell in Night;
> But does a human form display
> To those who dwell in realms of Day."[1]

Of what the mystic has made the awakening stage Blake has made three stages, those of innocence, awakening, and experience. In these three stages of his early lyrical expressions is found the germ of all his later visions. He toiled unceasingly,- creating, elaborating, and explaining symbol after symbol that these visions might become incarnate in the lives of men.

The Part Purgation Plays in Blake's Poetry.

Having awakened in the Mystic Way Blake immediately directs his mind to the purification of his understanding. He faces the problems of life, of instinct, of energy, and of reason squarely. His faith in divine human nature makes for his success; he is eager to declare the saving power of inspiration. Against inspiration he places reason. He does this to show that reason is a cramping power in life and man must be

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1. Blake, William, Lyrical Poems, p. 174, Oxford Ed.

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purged of reason before it usurps the place of spirit.

Reason a Cramping Power in Life

Reason, to Blake, was a malignant spirit forever struggling with the "Emanation" or the imaginative side of man, whose triumph is the supreme end of the universe. We have his own words to tell us this in:

> "My spectre around me night and day
> Like a wild beast guards my way;
> My Emanation far within
> Weeps incessantly for my sin."[1]

Blake felt that reason, if allowed to, would usurp the throne of the spirit and enslave human energies. He felt that it would replace religion by a morality and thus become an abstract objecting "power that negatives everything, that it would not guide the energies of life but cramp them, with a persistent 'Thou shalt not.'"[2] The poem from which these lines were taken ("My Spectre around me night and day") represents the mental conflict of fallen man. His intellect has cast out pleasure and named her "Sin". Everywhere he tracks her remorselessly, in an effort to subjugate her completely. But any such domination of one mental activity over another is bound to bring misery. The Emanation herself, who is the inspiration, indicates then this union as a salvation.

According to Berger, Reason or Law, the restrictive side of the human being which manufactures a steel doctrine -

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1. Sampson, John, Lyrical Poems of William Blake, p. 100
2. Ker, W. P., Essays and Studies, Vol. III, Chap. VII, p. 142

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a moral order - becomes the Spectre of Blake's poem, while the gentle side of pity and tenderness, of inspiration and creative fervor is described as the Emanation.[1] Blake was very fond of repeating that "Man in the state of Experience has rejected certain lovely aspects of life because they seem trivial, dangerous, or merely illogical."[1] "Man's salvation," says Blake, "consists in overcoming this division of inspiration and reason, in synthesizing everything, in literally making self whole."[1] When this harmony is attained, man has transcended the world and is actually living in eternity.

Inspiration
Conquering
Reason.

"The psychologist of to-day", says Damon, "would speak of the spectre and the emanation as being the state of the consciousness and the state of the subconsciousness." He says that "every artist tries intuitively to unite them, since all creative moments are the suffusion of the former by the latter."[2] In his message from the Mystic Way, Blake says, "Inspiration must conquer if the purgation is to be complete." If it doesn't, the spectre becomes a false God of materiality and what is capable of light becomes total darkness.

> "Each man is in his spectre's power
> Until the arrival of that hour
> When his humanity awake
> And cast his spectre into the lake."[3]

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1. Berger, William Blake, pp. 125-127
2. Damon, S. Foster, William Blake - His Philosophy and Symbols, p. 133
3. Sampson, John, Lyrical Poems of William Blake, p. 100

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Blake's Concept of Purification. Blake has three phases to his concept of purgation. The first is that evil recognized will expire itself, bringing about a purification or a rebirth out of which the realm of sense will begin to enter into rightful harmony with life. The second is that the reality of spiritual life is far superior and more lasting than transitory material existence. The third is that love, which ennobles and creates must be full and free, but must also be suffused with Eternal Life, if not to be made futile. These three phases of Blake's concept of purification are found in three of his later poems. The first concept is found in "Tiriel", the second in the "Book of Thel", and the third in the "Crystal Cabinet". The fervor with which Blake pressed his concepts into these poems makes us recognize him as a mystic.[1]

Tiriel, the aged father, represents the religion of hypocrisy which rules over the body and its sensations. "Tiriel has wandered far from his source in Poetic Genius, the beginning of all religion, and he acts contrary to the Creative Principle. He casts out his brother, Ijim, the Religion of Fear, and is himself overcome by his sons. With vision gone, Tiriel wandered in the valley of degenerate poetry. Reason in the person of Mnetha watches over the arts. Tiriel joins himself to her company by disguising his own identity. Ijim

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1. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poems of William Blake, p. 38

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1. Moody, Willa. Mysticism in the Poems of William Blake, p. 58

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"The Book of Thel", a poem of exquisite symbolic beauty, follows "Tiriel" quite naturally. Thel, youngest daughter of the Seraphim, bewails the transitoriness of life and all beautiful things. In her lamentation she beholds the Cloud dying for the life of the flower, the Flower giving itself to the Lamb. In their respective ways they tell her that "Everything that lives, lives not for itself alone."[3] They tell her that only when she has reached the state of utter selflessness would she be able to behold steadfastly the seeming transitoriness of youth and of beautiful things. Thel consents to enter into this world; then hearing a dirge about

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The emotional phase of this stage of Purgation is found in "The Crystal Cabinet,"[2] wherein Blake enunciates the idea that love, the emotion of life that ennobles and creates, should be free and full. He shows, nevertheless, the futility of it, when not suffused with Eternal Life. Blake tells in this poem the story of a man who was locked within a golden crystal cabinet by a maiden. Within the man finds another world and another maiden. He kisses her, to find she returns his kiss with a threefold one. As he tries to seize her - to love her - the crystal breaks. Man then returns to find the old world once more filled with woe, because love these two people had for each other had been of a physical reaction; it had not been suffused with Eternal Life, so was futile.

The summation of the purgative stage for Blake appears in the two prose tractates named "There is No Natural Religion"[3] and "All Religions are One."[4] In these he says:

> "If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot."

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1. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poetry of William Blake, p. 40
2. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 123
3. Blake, William, Lyrical Poems, p. 425
4. Ibid., p. 427

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3. Blake, William, Lyrical Poems, p. 422
4. Ibid., p. 427

"The desires of Man being Infinite,
the possession is Infinite and himself
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The Part That Illumination Plays in Blake's Poetry.

Blake shrank from the people in the society in which he moved, for he thought they mocked him. In so doing he became more intimate with his own imaginative folk and with God. The nearer he came to God the more solid God became. When he came into personal relation with Him, he knew that He was a person. He believed that a man found his real self only after he had given himself passionately to Jesus.

From out the mental struggle Blake has had in order to understand evil and to resolve discord into harmony, he has come with an unquestioned and an unquestioning faith. Being close to the reality of spiritual life he has asked, "How shall infinity be revealed to humanity? How shall the report of sense be translated into the language of the spirit?"

Infinity Revealed to Humanity. An answer to his first question is found in love which is self-annihilating, since it moves through all the earth to give ease to another to build "Heaven in a Hell's despair."[1] "Love's mission", says Blake, "is to find the spirit of the Eternal in sorrow." In "William Bond" we find

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1. Blake, William, Lyrical Poems, p. 179

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1. Blake, William. Lyrical Poems. p. 175

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"I thought Love lived in the hot sunshine,
But O, he lives in the moony light!
I thought to find Love in the heat of day,
But sweet Love is the comforter of night.

"See Love in the pity of another's woe,
In the gentle relief of another's care,
In the darkness of night and the winter's snow,
With the naked and outcast, seek Love there."[1]

Herein we see a tiny speck of Christian mysticism wherein self is annihilated to give ease to another.

Another way for Infinity to reveal itself to humanity is by submerging selfhood, while listening to the spirit dictating. Blake often wrote a poem on paper as quickly as it came to his mind because he said the Eternal Spirit compelled him to do so.

"Europe - A Prophecy" states his claim of the dictation of the spirit in these words:

".....I will write a book on leaves of flowers
If you will feed me on love-thoughts, and give me now and then
A cup of sparkling poetic fancies.....
.....When I came
Into my parlour and sat down, and took my pen to write
My Fairy sat upon the table and dictated 'Europe.'"[2]

"Europe - A Prophecy" stood, for Blake in his rebellious mood, as the symbol of tradition, science, and religion. It was the dead past. During its long sleep Europe was with-

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2. Blake, William, Poetry and Prose of William Blake, pp. 232-233

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 132
2. Blake, William, Poetry and Prose of William Blake, pp. 232-233

out vision, inspiration, art, and true nature. Falling under the tyranny of the five senses, she believed only so much as the senses could testify of; hence she was rational, utilitarian, unimaginative, and joyless. But Blake believed he had seen the morning star that heralded the full blaze of the sun. The invisible powers who control nations and men were stirring and preparing their last fearful conflict which should result in new heavens and a new earth. The angels were at war. Urizin, Orc, Los, Enitharmon and their many daughters and sons fight against each other in heaven when on Earth was kindled in France an earthly counterpart and shadow of the horrible conflict. The work of regeneration once begun, could not be arrested. Passion, fire, energy, all the irresistible things pent up in hell were let loose. The whole cosmos was dyed in crimson - and in infinite pain should come to birth, the new age, of which the prophets and poets had dreamed in all ages.

"Europe - A Prophecy" touches the limit of Blake's rebellion. Blake was to learn that rebellion is a road to wisdom because it is a species of excess. Excess teaches a man to know what is enough, and when Blake knew the exact value of rebellion he was prepared to read the Past afresh, and find that its treasury contained priceless jewels that he never even suspected while he was passionately searching for some new thing.

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So by annihilating selfhood to give ease to another in times of sorrow and by submerging selfhood while listening to the spirit dictate, Blake writes poetry and engraves pictures to reveal Infinity to humanity.

The Part the Dark Night of the Soul Plays in Blake's Poetry.

In the experiences of Blake there appeared the dark night of the soul; we noted its length by the years of mental oppression spent at Felpham. The full glory of rapture came after he made a decision to leave the pursuit of patronage and position, and be faithful to the heavenly vision.[1]

In various ways Blake symbolized the dark night in his poetry. Blake lays claim to the fact that man is the universe; the human personality is a reflection of Infinity. "In the cosmos," he says, "are the divided regions of the energies; in man are the same divisions which wage bitter warfare (dark night) among themselves - each one endeavoring to be supreme and to rule all the others. The divine essence in man is his responsible free will; through this agency, the individual has the ability to bring harmony."[2]

Going to history we find Blake explaining it in this way:

Adam is born in a state of innocence; he becomes

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1. Gilchrist, Alexander, Life of William Blake, Chap. XVII
2. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poetry of William Blake, p. 58

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divided when his emanation appears in Eve. Mortality is imposed on them and both are driven from the garden into experience. Materialism triumphs, moral codes are established and the human race is bound in iron. Jesus descends to reveal the forgotten Infinity of the race, and to demonstrate the triumphant spiritual life. His work was destroyed when formulated into church doctrine. Inspiration is shrouded in darkness again in the oppression of Reason. "The challenge," says Blake, "is to dissipate the dark night by Christ's religion of Instinct, Imagination, Understanding, and Forgiveness."[1]

A picture of the dominion of Reason may be found in these words:

> "I turn my eyes to Schools and Universities of Europe
> And there behold the Loom of Lock
> whose woof rages dire
> Wash'd by the Water-wheels of Newton
> .....cruel works
> Of many wheels I view, wheel without wheel,
> with cogs tyrannic
> Moving by compulsion each other, not as those in Eden, which
> Wheel within wheel, in freedom revolve in harmony and peace."[2]

The symbol of the wheel seems a familiar picture if we remember the many spheres of Milton's and Dante's cosmos. The use of this metaphor for the rule of Reason appears most appropriate

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1. Damon, S. Foster, William Blake - His Philosophy and Symbols, Chap. XXV
2. Blake, William, Jerusalem, p. 574

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1. Damon, S. Foster, William Blake - His Philosophy and Symbols, Chap. XXV
2. Blake, William, Jerusalem, p. 274

for Blake's Philosophy.

We meet this wheel again in the application to religion in these words:

"I stood among my valleys to the south
And saw a flame of fire, even as a Wheel
Of fire surrounding all the heavens: it went
From west to east, against the current of
Creation and devour'd all things in its loud
Fury and thund'ring course round heaven and earth.
..... He answered: 'It is the Wheel of Religion.'
I wept and said: 'Is this the law of Jesus
This terrible devouring sword turning every way?'
He answered: 'Jesus died because he strove
Against the current of this Wheel; its name
Is Caiaphas, the dark preacher of Death,
Of sin, of sorrow, and of punishment.'"[1]

Beside education and religion oppressing the spirit of man, industry and social conditions continue the darkening influence. Blake pictures the mechanism of Urizen thus:

".....Wheel without wheel
To perplex youth in their outgoings and to bind to labours
Of day & night the myriads of Eternity that they might file
And polish brass & iron hour after hour, laborious workmanship,
Kept ignorant of the use that they might spend the days of wisdom
In sorrowful drudgery to obtain a scanty pittance of bread
In ignorance to view a small portion & think that all,
And call it demonstration, blind to all the simple rules of life."[2]

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1. Blake, William, Jerusalem, Chap. IX, p. 703
2. Blake, William, Vala, p. 393

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Blake looks at education and religion as they clip the wings of youth; he views the social and industrial agencies as they blind the spiritual sense. He sees that all is darkness. He, impelled by the vision of Eternity, brings his gospel to give freedom, beauty, and spiritual significance to the individual.

The Part the Unitive Life Plays in Blake's Poetry.

Blake was destined to stay three years at Felpham, a "sweet place for study",[1] granted him by a friend named Hayley. After his return from Felpham, Blake dwelt in two worlds, the world of reality and the world of the spirit. There, of course, were vicissitudes in his life in London but to him they were negligible. Nevermore did he lose his visions or find his raptures darkened. He turned to preach his everlasting gospel, for the forces within him refused to let him be silent. His heart was full of love and service for those who wished to hear him he spoke.

Blake's closing years, according to Damon, had three phases of the one truth, namely, spiritual pride, forgiveness, and brotherhood. The principles of these three phases are tightly condensed in his "Everlasting Gospel."[2] This poem contains a series of challenging epigrams, which defy analysis,

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1. Gardner, Charles, William Blake, the Man, p. 119
2. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, pp. 109-118

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since their object is to excite the reader by creating lively impressions on his mind. Some of these are:

"To teach doubt and experiment
Certainly was not what Christ meant."
. . .
"Was Jesus born of a virgin pure
With narrow soul and looks demure?"
. . .
"Was Jesus chaste, or did he
Give any lessons in chastity?"
. . .
"Did Jesus teach doubt, or did he
Give lessons in philosophy?"
. . .
"This life's five windows of the soul
Distort the heavens from pole to pole.
And lead you to believe a lie,
When you see with, not through the eye."

Each line adds to the grandeur of the figure of the revolutionary Jesus reaching a climax in these words:

"This is the race that Jesus ran:
Humble to God, haughty to man,
Cursing the Rulers before the people
Even to the Temple's highest steeple,
And when He humbled Himself to God
Then descended the cruel rod.
'If Thou humblest Thyself, Thou
humblest Me.'
Thou also dwellst in Eternity.
Thou art a man: God is no more:
~~They~~ Your own Humanity learn to adore
For that is My Spirit of Life.
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Humility is only doubt,
And does the sun and moon blot out.
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As spiritual pride and brotherhood were expressed in the above words so forgiveness is noted in "Jerusalem". In

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1. Rossetti, William M., Poetical Works of William Blake, pp. 151-153

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1. Rossetti, William M., Poetical Works of William Blake, pp. 181-183

this poem, the woman taken in adultery is brought before Jesus. She has profaned her body,- "Love's temple that God dwelleth in"- for covetousness, but Blake freely grants her full forgiveness in these words:

> " .....'if I were pure, never could I taste
> the sweets
> Of the forgiveness of Sins; if I were holy, I
> never could behold the tears
> Of love of him who loves me in the midst of
> his anger in furnace of fire."[1]

Why did Christ come upon Earth? Not to save the world from materialism, or sexual strife, but to affirm God in man. This element, being divine and Eternal through the agency of the free will, and developing forgiveness, brotherhood, may rise again to its source, may harmonize its divisions, may reconstitute the many into the one. Blake's creed is "not the assumed humanity of God but the achieved divinity of Man."[2]

In his myths and symbols, Blake argues that if man is eternal with a divine nature, all is good. This idealism is the vision of unity that Blake wishes to bring clearly to the understanding of man. The Bible has it, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." If Man carries on creative activity, he is becoming that which he beholds. If the vision within him is infinite, then shall his spirit grow to encompass Infinitude.[3] From such principles as these can be drawn these logical con-

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1. Blake, William, Jerusalem, Chap. III, p. 666
2. Swinburne, A. C., Critical Essay on William Blake, p. 240
3. Moody, Willa, Mysticism in the Poetry of William Blake, pp. 63-65

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2. Swinburne, A. C., Critical Essay on William Blake, p. 240
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clusions in Blake's system of morality. That restriction is evil and a limit of the mundane shell. Desires and aspirations keep before our minds the idea of the Divine and maintain our hold on Eternity; therefore freely follows the impulses to incarnate more and more of the divine into life.

In "Jerusalem", the application of the symbol of harmony is made to earthly relations to demonstrate the likeness of divine human nature to the Eternal Divinity. The giant Albion, father of all the races of the earth, reposes in Beulah's sleep upon the island of the sea. The sons and daughters of Albion live to their own devices in the world, subject to the oppression of passion and reason warring against each other. Los and Enithormon plan the awakening of Albion from sleep to redemption by the creation of the lovely emanation Jerusalem. Jerusalem is described as St. John the Divine describes her: the city of God prepared for the Lamb "as a bride for the bridegroom."[1] With the union of Albion and Jerusalem is brought the lifting of all to the plane of spirit. In "Jerusalem" we find it worded thus:

> "Heaven, Earth and Hell henceforth shall live
> in harmony
> . . . . .
> Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human
> Imagination
> A Saviour pour upon me thy spirit of meekness
> and Love:
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> life!"[2]

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1. Revelations 21:2, The Holy Bible.
2. Blake, William, Jerusalem, Chap. 1, pp. 551-554

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2. Blake, William, Jerusalem, Chap. 1, pp. 581-584

These words express the attainment of Blake in the Unitive Life. His days pass in joy and peace with never a thought of sorrow or despair. His way now is sure in its progress to the ultimate end. With this surety comes a superabundance of activity. His vitality, whether in hours of health or of suffering seems superhuman. He must finish "The Last Judgment" and "Job" even if he is confined to his bed. Yet the end for Blake was one of sheer joy in service.

The Part Mysticism Plays in Blake's Engravings

Blake, the artist, who is inclined toward visualization translates his spiritual experience into concrete pictorial designs in terms of color and form. He is often more impressive than Blake, the poet, for, because of his more concrete method, he is the more generally understood. The great fluid visions which surge up before the mind of Blake are symbolic pictures which represent an actual interior experience, a real contact with the supersensual, exhibiting the interpretative power inherent in the mystical imagination. These pictures are seen by the "mystic within the mind, sometimes as projections in space - always in sharp definition, lit by that strong light which is peculiar to visionary states."[1] They are not produced by any voluntary process

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1. Underhill, Evelyn, Essentials of Mysticism, p. 77

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M.C. 880 W. Blake: The Infant Jesus Praying London, Medici Society, Ltd.

Engraved and printed in England *Boston. Hale, Cushman & Flint*

of composition, but loom up as do the best creations of every artist from his deeper mind, bringing with them an intense conviction of reality. Good instances are the visions which so often occur at conversion or mark the transition from one stage of the Mystic Way to another. The mystic marriage of St. Catherine of Siena was the vision of True Resignation which initiated Suso (a mystic) into the "dark night of the soul." So we find, at the transitional points in Blake's spiritual life, symbols in his engravings that portray his visions. Blake's spiritual life has a richness and a balance of his own nature. We see him from boyhood seeking to satisfy his innate longing for spiritual reality. He is urged on the one hand by the artist's craving for perfect loveliness and on the other hand by the philosopher's instinct for Eternity. Blake's Eternal home was so real to him that his art echoed its mysteries and his engraved symbols sought to portray its characteristics. As there were seven stages of the soul's progress portrayed in his poems, so there are the same stages expressed by his symbolism in the engravings. Some of these stages are more easily recognizable than others. Just what these stages are Blake doesn't make clear. From observation one may get some kind of an idea of what these stages are.

The Stage of Innocence.

In the very lovely picture called "The Infant Jesus Praying" we readily note the stage of innocence wherein Blake

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The Stage of Innocence.

In the very lovely picture called "The Infant Jesus
Playing in Joseph's Shop" we see the stage of innocence wherein Christ

Drawing by William Blake, 1757–1827
The creation of Eve

doubts not, but maintains an implicit trust in God who sends angels to guard the innocent Jesus. These angels are taller, and statelier than Jesus, because they have been living the Unitive Life over a very much longer period than the infant Jesus. If they had not a greater goodness than he they would not be able to shield him from harm.

The Awakening Stage.

Blake began to find there was a world about him that had its own needs and desires. His awakening to the divine presence of God is visible in the engravings he made for the poem, "The Grave" written by Robert Blair. Later he hears his brother Robert's voice speaking to him. Through the instruction of this deceased brother, Robert, William Blake develops an individualistic type of illuminated engraved poems. Even though folks about him thought him queer, he continued writing and engraving the messages Robert sent. "The Creation of Eve" engraving portrays the awakening stage, also.[1]

The Purgation Stage.

With purgation begins the period of self knowledge. Previously the sense recorded only finitude, now infinity breaks upon it and its limitations are clearly perceived.

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Drawing by William Blake, 1757–1827
The temptation of Eve

The soul needs to be purged of its impurities. In the engraving "The Temptation of Eve" from the Bible Series we find God sending the serpent to Eve to test her. She yields to Satan's temptation. God at once shows his displeasure by sending dark clouds of warning and lightning. In the engraving "Satan with Adam and Eve" we note the presence of an angel as well as of Satan. The angel seemingly shelters the pair, protecting them from the sin of Satan who is so close at hand. In "Expulsion from the Garden" Gabriel leads the Heavenly couple who have sinned out of the garden of Eden. Behind Gabriel stand the steeds and the horsemen giving force to the action, for even though the serpent is present the couple must be rescued before he does more harm. The lightning shows God's displeasure.

In pointing the more direct way to purification of body and soul we come upon "The Woman Taken in Adultery."[1] In this engraving Christ is seen bending to the ground in an act of writing. The woman stands with subdued expression, very naturally given. The Jews are trooping out, all their backs turned away from the incident. The colors are pale and the style not of the highest type of execution, yet the picture possesses grandeur.

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1. See engraving facing page 44

Drawing by William Blake, 1757–1827
Satan with Adam and Eve

The Illumination Stage.

Blake's problem in the stage of illumination was to show how Infinity might be revealed to humanity. He believed one would find eternal life if one annihilated selfhood in order to bring joy and love to others. He believed by submerging self one might hear the voice of the Ineffable Being. So he submerged himself, avoided society, and listened for the voice of God. He heard it very often. In his early youth Blake did not have a spiritual understanding with God, but he did hear God's voice. God once pressed upon his forehead as he looked out of a window. This frightened him so, he wept. Later he referred to seeing angels in a tree beside his home, and to talking with Ezekiel whom he found sitting one summer day in the open fields.[1] Blake's parents little knew of these visions William was having. They often thrashed him for telling what they thought were untruths. Of these visitors Blake made no engravings. But later in life and as far back as the last year of life, Blake worked fast to copy the images that came before his mind. The engravings of "The Book of Job" and Dante's "Divine Comedy" were the finest ones he engraved. His purpose of engraving these, aside from the pleasure it gave him, was to show to humanity how Infinity had revealed itself to him. He felt, if these

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, Introduction, pp. xii-xiii

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, Introduction, pp. xii-xiii

Drawing by William Blake, 1757–1827
The expulsion from Eden

engravings gave him so much pleasure they might also bring joy and pleasure to others. So not only by writing poems did Blake pass through the stage of Illumination but also by engraving pictures.

Rapture and Ecstasy.

From the stories of Catharine Blake, his wife, we glean much about Blake's raptures and his moments of ecstasy. It was not long after she had married him, that she, too, shared these moments of ecstasy with him. She, too, began to believe in the communion with the visitants and felt an importance was attached to their revelations.

As Blake withdrew more and more from his human associates, he naturally withdrew more and more within himself. As he did so he developed a profundity of his own creations in art. In each new attempt at art he seems to come nearer to the meaning of Eternal Life - the Unitive Life. The engraving called the "Ascension"[1] is the only picture procurable that reveals his feeling of rapture and ecstasy. On the faces of the prophets on the right of the picture is revealed that utter joy and longing for the Eternal Life, Blake himself so often felt.

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1. "Ascension", engraving facing page 45

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1. "Ascension", engraving facing page 46

Woman Taken in Adultery - Bible Series-

The Dark Night of the Soul.

As Blake had his moments of rapture and of ecstasy, so he had his moments of deep despair. His engraving, "The Downfall of the Rebel Angels"[1], is one example of his feeling for those who have sinned. The angels, who in the story of Milton's "Paradise Lost" refused to follow instructions, difficult though they may have been, were sent hurtling into hell, being shown no mercy at all. The engraving, "The Last Judgment" from the Bible Series also portrays this spirit of darkness and despair through which man goes to realize the complete power to attain the Ultimate means to ascend the heights again in order that the soul may be bowed to utter acquiescence to the purposes of God.

The Unitive Life.

When the soul is bowed in utter acquiescence to the purposes of God, the abandon of the individual initiates the Unitive Life. This Unitive Life is a life filled with service. When service and joy is rendered to others, when man shares his all with others, then he has reached the Unitive Life. In the "Ascension"[2] we see the longing on the faces of some of the prophets who have no fear, but seeing Christ ascend to God,

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1. "Downfall of the Rebel Angels", engraving facing page 46
2. "Ascension", engraving facing page 45

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1. "Downfall of the Rebel Angels", engraving facing page 46
2. "Ascension", engraving facing page 48

Engraved and printed in England

M.C. 488 BLAKE—ASCENSION M.S. Lb., LONDON

wish they might ascend with him. There are two on the left who are still filled with fear; they have not yet joined their souls with God. Blake in engraving this picture portrays himself possibly as the one who is on his way to meet God as Christ himself was portrayed in this picture. The angel descending on either side seems filled with joy, anticipating for those fearless prophets below the joy of the Eternal Life they soon will lead.

Another evidence of Blake's feeling for Eternal Life is expressed in his last engraving called "The Ancient of Days," which is used as a frontispiece for his "Europe: A Prophecy." This vision was seen by him against the dark gloom of the upper story of his Lambeth House. Its source is found in the Book of Proverbs. There it is written, "When He prepared the heavens, I was there. When He set a compass upon the face of the depth .... then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him."[1] The author of the Proverbs looks back to the first creation, which God saw to be very good. Blake looks forward to the new. What if all around are dark clouds? Yet the "Ancient of Days"[2] is in an orb of light, and He is stooping down and measuring the deep with his compasses. Nothing can stay His hand. The upheaval of Europe, involving

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1. The Bible, Proverbs VIII, Verses 27-31
2. Figgis-Darrell, Paintings by Blake, Plate 1

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2. Blake-Darrell, Paintings by Blake, Plate I

Drawing by William Blake, 1757–1827
The downfall of the rebel angels

the world, is the prelude to the new creation when the Almighty's vision for His universe shall be fulfilled. The white hair and white beard of the human God, whom Blake knew so well, is being blown toward the West by a terrific East gale. This whiteness against the deeply crimsoned sunset gives a striking contrast. Nowhere else has Blake seemed to have expressed his primary theistic ideas so well.

Thus far we have noted the stages of mysticism and the part these stages play in Blake's poetry and in his engravings. Since symbolism was Blake's method of revealing his mysticism we must note how he used and developed it.

Symbolism, the Method of Blake's Mysticism

The several stages of Blake's mysticism were expressed through a symbolism of Blake's own making. This symbolism is found in both his poetry and in his engravings.

The Meaning of Symbolism.

Symbolism is a representation of objects, of qualities, or of ideas by means of symbols. No mode of expression seemed so adequate to Blake as symbolism to express all the meaning of his message. Early in his life he learned to regard the arts as media for visionary truth rather than as stimuli of erotic sensations.

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The Development of his Symbolism in his Poetry.

His Early Beginnings. The very first use of symbolism was in 1787 when he used it in names. At thirty years of age Blake began to amuse himself and others by expressing his contempt for the literary tea-party in his "Island in the Moon."[1] It never got beyond a few pages. Some gentlemen did not like it at all. Others chuckled over it. Plowman tells us that "The inanities of literary gossip, the futile inconsequences of drawing-room conversation and the pretentiousness of specialized learning in its shirt-sleeves have never been better hit off. It is here that Blake began to use descriptive names expressive of particular vocations of his characters. Suction, Quid, Mrs. Gimblet, and Miss Gittipin are really Blake's first essays in symbolism."[2]

A Strength in Spontaneity. Later we notice that a spontaneity exists in his "Songs of Innocence"; it is a spontaneity of art, not of nature, of imagination and not of experience. "But for these songs, Blake might never have been brought into the realm of art."[3] The poems in "The Songs of Innocence" are all symbolic. "The Lamb" is a symbol of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. "Infant Joy" is a symbol

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1. Not accessible in any library; seemingly out of print.
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of infancy; "The Little Black Boy" is a symbol of childhood; "The Laughing Song" stands for youth;- all three, infancy, childhood, and youth being the ages of innocence. The poems called "A Cradle Song", "Nurse's Song", and "Holy Thursday" of the same group are symbolic of the same three ages of innocence but this time they are treated in relation to society. The remaining poems of this book, which portray the human soul in its quest for self-realization, are all of ever deeper symbolic import. Reading them in the order in which Blake decided they should be read, we pass through consecutive stages of growth from infancy to self-consciousness into manhood. These stages are indicative of the stages through which Blake himself passed as he went along the Mystic Way.

A Growth in Power of Symbolism. A growth in Blake's power in the handling of symbols is noticeable in his treatment of the symbol, the lamb. The words of the naturalistic method hadn't the depth of meaning he wished to give the word. Therefore when he writes "Little Lamb God bless thee", he carries the mind beyond the creature, the lamb, to the young innocent child whom he identifies with the Lamb of God. The harmony of these three concurring images (the lamb, the child, and the Saviour of the world - all images of innocence) is the true cause of our delight in this poem. Blake could not write about a lamb without thinking of the two other connotations. In similar

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ways the rest of Blake's symbols have also grown under his hand. If we turn back to the chapter on "The Part Mysticism Plays in his Poetry" we shall see this growth as well as the symbols themselves. Thus Blake's thought was becoming enriched rapidly all the while he was writing "The Songs of Innocence" and gradually he began to realize that poetry of the naturalistic order was only indirectly capable of carrying his entire message and that the naturalistic method impeded the spiritual intent.

A Purpose for his Symbolism.

Already we have learned that the naturalistic method hadn't the depth of meaning Blake wished to give his words. So plunging deeply into the heart of life, he created his own symbols in the hope of better conveying the significance of his own experiences, of revealing the truth as he saw it, and of describing the plane of spirit which he had attained. He wished to write of the soul to the exclusion of all other themes, so what option had he but to use symbols? They were inevitable. They were an enrichment of poetry as poetry, so long as they were symbols whose imagery was immediately recognizable. Some of Blake's symbols ~~are~~ seem immediately recognizable, others are void of meaning. What may be said in justification of them? Simply this. Blake was never intentionally mysterious because he wrote to reveal and not to conceal, because he was a poet, who

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expressed explicitly what he believed was the truth. His use of symbols was not arbitrary; he made use of them merely to express more completely his entire message.

The Application of his Symbols in his Engravings.

When Blake took the soul for his province, he found it a world wholly unmapped and unchartered. With an exactitude which is baffling in its thoroughness, he set out making maps and charts of this undiscovered country. Being a poet, he possessed to a peculiar degree that personalizing or anthropomorphic power which, for divine reasons, has always been the property of a poet. Blake's faith in a spiritual, as distinct from a natural, world, was such that he believed all things were personalizations. He did not merely take attributes of the soul and give them names. For him these attributes had spiritual identity, and the power of seeing the spirit in distinct and minute details, which comprised the material substances, he called "vision". So the creatures of his imagination were to him realities of which any physical manifestation was only the shadow. The animating principle of an object was to him the spiritual source of its being. More and more he endeavored to envisage the animating principle and not to be put off with material semblance. He never rested until he saw the animating principle with such clearness of vision that it attained identity. When he found identity he gave it a name. Thus occurred the growth of all of Blake's

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The Application of his Symbols in his Engravings.

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symbols. They grew as his perceptive insight grew.

As we now study a few of his engravings to notice how he carried out the above purposes, let us decide whether his symbols made or marred his paintings.

First we come to his early work, a series of twelve splendid engravings for the poem "The Grave" by Robert Blair. Here we have a representation of the various stages of life after death from the moment the man breathes his last breath until the Day of Judgment. There are three of this series one does not readily forget. They are the first, the eighth, and the tenth. In the first, which portrays the stage of innocence, a trumpeter is announcing a message from Heaven into the ear of a skeleton which lies in its grave. This skeleton is man with no knowledge of the Ultimate life. The trumpeter is awakening him. The inverted figure, representing an angel, seems, in its grace, more a figure of one who knew anatomy than of one who never studied it. In the eighth, the dark night of the soul stage, a figure symbolizing the soul of man hovers over the body, reluctantly parting with life. There is no utter surrender here, so man can't enjoy the Unitive Life. It is the tenth engraving that symbolizes the reunion of the soul and of the body on the Day of Judgment, marking the surrender of soul of man to God - or the Unitive Life. Each picture, full of symbolism, is, in its own way, magnificently rendered, much more so when you

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consider the fact that Blake was only fifteen years old when he engraved it. At this early age Blake had not probably decided what the mystic way was or what the several stages along it might be. Indeed he may not have thought much at all about these matters. This proves to one nevertheless that his early thoughts were along the lines of mysticism and when later he was ready to formulate his ideas, he had the ideas ready on which to work.

The smaller bit of art which portrays Blake's power in finding the identity between the animating principle and the clear vision is the engraving in Gilchrist's Book on "William Blake" called "The Ghost of a Flea". Blake, like any other great mystic, goes about with a magnifying glass. He sees the flea as a giant, and the tall castle, in which the giant lives, is the microscope. He portrays the flea in lines of a human skull the most striking line of which is the hard, long curve of the spine, which goes up without a single flicker to the back of the brutal head. The face is swinish; its eyes alive with glitter, are akin to madness. His forked tongue is extended as he holds a bowl of blood before him. In all, he is terrific; he is Blake's symbol of rapacious man - the Ghowl or Bloodsucker. To Blake, this ghost symbolizes the idea or the principle of the flea. That idea or principle of the flea is blood-thirstiness - the feeding on the life of another, the fury of the parasite. The vision of the flea is the vision of blood. It will not

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be denied that Blake shows the best part of the mystic's attitude in seeing the soul of this flea as ten thousand[1] times larger than the flea itself. To Blake the flea itself is hazy as compared to the actuality of his ghost. In spite of this ghost's grotesqueness, it has great strength, great significance, and even a grandeur.

The most beautiful of his artistic works is the "Book of Job" which symbolizes the spiritual life of man. "Job", the clearest and the profoundest of all his pictorial diagrams, charts the spiritual life of man and beside being mere illustrations of his words marks out a map of the mystic way. Blake didn't merely happen upon Job. "The Book of Job" from the Bible had always been Blake's favorite reading material. In doing "Job" Blake was trying to reconcile all the great contradictions of the universe and to justify the ways of God to man. The story he chose allowed him great philosophic freedom, of which he took full advantage. Job, in the Bible, is the innocent and just man suddenly struck down by overwhelming misfortunes. The author was trying to refute the idea that catastrophe is punishment of sin. Job is upright yet he is ruined in a moment. Because of his faith in God, who descends upon him in a whirlwind, he is now left more prosperous than ever. The process

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1. Damon, S. Foster, William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols, p. 223

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of evil nevertheless is left unsolved. The Deity says that Job cannot understand the Divine way; that he is presumptuous in questioning it. Faith, not knowledge, is the secret of salvation. At least so the Bible says.

Blake did not like such an evasion of the great world problem "sin". Blake's answer to it might have been something like this:

"That Job, living in accordance with the laws written by others, rather than by his own instincts, had left himself open to the inroads of Satan. He had relied upon a moral code for his happiness, not realizing that the invulnerable happiness comes only from a sacrifice of self. This knowledge is revealed during the passage through the states or stages of the Mystic Way. The catastrophe poured upon him by Satan really sprang from his own false notions of virtue; and as long as Job is self-satisfied, he will be afflicted by these unexpected turns of fate. But his troubles drive him to look inwards into his own soul. As soon as he does this, he not only recognizes and casts out error of his life; he sees Divinity itself, and after such a vision nothing more can trouble him. Such is the philosophy of Blake's "Job",[1] but its story is that of descent of God and the ascent of Man. So we find Blake departing from the Bible not only in his

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of evil nevertheless is left unsolved. The Deity says that Job cannot understand the Divine way; that he is presumptuous in questioning it. Faith, not knowledge, is the secret of salvation. At least so the Bible says.

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"That Job, living in accordance with the laws written by others, rather than by his own instincts, had left himself open to the invasion of Satan. He had relied upon a moral code for his happiness, not realizing that the invaluable happiness comes only from a sacrifice of self. This knowledge is revealed during the passage through the states or stages of the Mystic Way. The catastrophe poured upon him by Satan really sprang from his own false notions of virtue; and as long as Job is self-satisfied, he will be afflicted by these unexpected turns of fate. But his troubles drive him to look inwards into his own soul. As soon as he does this, he not only recognizes and casts out error of his life; he sees Divinity itself, and after such a vision nothing more can trouble him. Such is the philosophy of Blake's "Job".[1] but its story is that of descent of God and the ascent of Man. So we find Blake departing from the Bible not only in his

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1. Damon, S. Foster. William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols. p. 223

philosophy but in many other things. He holds to the Bible as far as the story of the "Whirlwind" but thereafter he gives a succession of mystical visions explaining the Universe which are not found in the Bible. Blake's God does not consider Job presumptuous for challenging the divine wisdom. Job is fearless, not humble, and entirely capable of understanding occult mysteries. Job's wife is not the woman who advised her husband to curse God and die. On the contrary she has the fullest confidence in him and a great faith in God.

Upon one's first observation these illustrations of Job seem simple. Yet upon study each illustration becomes crowded with symbolism. What would the task of interpretation have been if he had put into these plates all the visionary characters with those inexplicable names? An impossible task perhaps. The first thing Dr. S. Foster Damon[1] makes clear to one, is that Blake saw in Job's fall and reascent the usual set of "States" which he had formulated as the "Seven Eyes of God". "These seven states were divinely instituted so that man should mechanically be brought back to communion with God. These seven states, which have been previously named and defined are, of course, the stages of innocence, of awakening, of experience, of

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purgation, of illumination, of the dark night of the soul, and of the Unitive Life.

Blake devotes two plates to each stage in turn, then the climax having been reached, the order is reversed, the final plate ending where the first began. "The Book of Job" outlines the course of the spiritual events through which Job passes and gives indication that he himself is to blame for his misfortunes, for it is his God and his Devil which he has made in his own likeness that work all the mischief. At first Job and God seem separate persons but at the climax they are beheld as one.

In order to get the fullest expressiveness for these ideas in his designs Blake developed to its extreme possibilities the traditional significance of the earliest Christian times of the "right" and the "left". The right place is a place of honor, the left, dishonor. Blake accepted this division, interpreting the right of the characters (the stage right - our left as we face the picture) as the spiritual half of the plate and the left as the material half. The exposure of the right or left foot, the right or left hand shows clearly the spiritual or material attitude of any character. Any inward action, as one in prayer, is shown by the character turning his back to the observer and facing the interior of the picture. Blake has used the Gothic architecture to denote the true church and the Druid

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architecture to denote its opponent - Moral Law. "Blake", says Damon,[1] "has always held that 'Gothic is the living Form' while Druid signified the 'primal Natural Religion' which sacrifices others but not the self."

On the frontispiece of "The Book of Job" appear the angels in flight. They are the Seven Eyes of God, the Seven of the Apocalypse. They descend on the material side of the plate and ascend on the spiritual; this is actually the summary of the entire book, a "representation of the greatest Christian mystery, a statement of the secret which every mystic tries to tell."[2]

So if we continued throughout the "Book of Job" we should find that symbolism is found in each of the twenty-one plates of Job. We need not continue on to the twenty-first plate, but we should stop a moment to observe the fourteenth, the one which rightly marks Blake a genius in the clarity and beauty of his symbolism.

In "The Morning Stars Sang Together", the substance of the fourteenth engraving of the series of "Job", we find the fusion of the imagination with the universal reality beyond. Layers of cloud divide the design into four great worlds of vision united by a Divine Being who appears in the spiritual likeness of Job. Below is the world of Time and of Space, the

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world as it appears to our bodily senses, shut off from everything but the earth. Above it opens the eternal world within which dwells the Creator, the light of life that illumines the whole universe. The inner world is divided into two parts. Beneath the Deity's right arm there rides forth the sun of the mind, driving the horses of instruction, while beneath the left arm the moon of poetic or woman's love controls and guides the serpents of corporeal desires. Love and thought Blake associates with Night and Morning. Between these and the seraphs above, we see the empty abyss representing the void of nature - the unknown, where we cannot trace the presence of Divine - humanity. But beyond this again is the universe of stars, the infinite life beyond our life, multitudinous in sea, air, and the countless generations of men with which our Eternal Being links us in sympathy and spiritual unity. "The seraphs are the Sons of God and poetic emanations of the divine human imagination. These seraphs mingling with the Morning stars adjoin man to man and awaken harmonies of so intense a joy, that it seems to tremble on the verge of a great sob, in which the eternal grief of the universe is merged in its eternal rapture. Excess of joy is like excess of grief. The uplifted arms of seraphs like the outspread ones of the Deity below are symbolic of active life which brings us into the relations with our fellow beings, giving meaning and liberty to our inward lives."[1]

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1. Blake, William, The Book of Job, Invented and engraved by him 1826 - from the description following illustration 14.

This picture of "The Morning Stars" from "The Book of Job" is equally as great an illustration of Genesis and of Blakean Christianity as it is a picture of work of reality and of the ideal world. It is easy to see why the conception of love, rising from within but becoming active and multitudinous in relation to its objects, could move Blake to so great a height of joy. (It had always been a wish of Blake's to construct a window containing the "Morning Star" idea. An admirer of Blake, who lives in New York, has just recently completed a window fulfilling Blake's wish.)

The Effect of his Symbolism on his Engravings.

As we study Blair's "Grave", "The Ghost of a Flea" and "Job" we must readily conclude that Blake's symbols made rather than marred his engravings. They enhance them and give them a grandeur they would not otherwise attain.

In concluding we must admit that the verbal symbols which Blake created have given a much deeper meaning to his words and have enriched his poetry. His pictorial symbols revealed more deeply the truth as he saw it and gave a clearer understanding of the plane of spirit of which he had attained. Through his symbolism in both poetry and in engraving Blake has more impressively expressed the several stages of his mysticism.

This picture of the [illegible] "the poor of Jew" is equally as great an illumination of Cornelia's and [illegible] characteristically as it is a picture of work or poverty and of the ideal world. It is seen to be by the conception of love, rising from minds not becoming motive and multitudinous [illegible] ion be like objects, could move alone to so great a height or [illegible]. It had always been a wish of Hiram's to construct a window containing the "burning bush" idea. In admiration of Cornelia, who lives in new York, has just recently completed a window multiplying Grace's dim.)

<u>Are matters of this complexity to be interpreted.</u>

As we study Hiram's "Poverty" was Mind or a [illegible] and "Job" we must readily conclude that Hiram's symbols made rather vast demands on his readers. Many evidence that and give them a grandeur they could not otherwise attain.

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II

THE ELEMENT OF ROMANTICISM

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The Meaning of Romanticism

Romanticism denotes the principles, the characteristics, or the spirit of the movement, primarily in literature for reasserting imagination and sentiment as against the restrictive formality of Classicism, a movement which prevailed before the time of Blake. We find in Romanticism the exact opposite of Classicism, for while there are a simplicity, a correctness of style, and no imagination or sentiment in Classicism, there is a complexity, a freedom of style, and a use of imagination and sentiment in Romanticism. Classicism denotes the principles and characteristics of Greek and Roman literature and art, considered as embodying formal elegance, dignity, with lucid conception and order.

The poets before Blake were Classicists. They used as their themes the religious, political, social, and philosophical problems of the day. In the study of these problems they saw man in the abstract; they centred life about the upper strata of society, the four hundred, not the four million. The Romanticists on the other hand studied the same problems but considered man not as an abstract being, but as someone with a soul; they centred life about the four million rather than the upper four hundred. Romanticism seemed to develop a feeling of recognition for the middle class.

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By about 1798 the Romanticist Movement had become a conscious reaction from classical to medieval models in Germany, England and France. Romanticism signified more especially the spirit of chivalry, adventure, and wonder, the preoccupation with the picturesque and suggestive aspects of nature and with the passionate in life. The Romanticist used Nature as a background for human life. He used it as a place to flee to for rest - as a solitude - as a place to reflect upon life. He used nature as an abode for Deity, as a place to reflect upon life after death. The Romanticist felt that the home was a sacred place and considered children the flower of the home. He felt they were a part of society as well. The Romanticist also felt that by looking back into the past, man could get a better perspective for the ideas of his own day. The Romantic writer, revived the works of older poets to obtain this matter of distance - this better perspective.

The Part Romanticism Plays in Blake's Poetry

The Element of Wonder.

The element of wonder, which arose from the slow upgrowth in men after a time of clear intellectualism into which all mystery of ourselves and of life disappeared, was supposed to have been explained by the Romanticists. A thousand phases of this element of wonder appear in the poets of the nineteenth

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century. "The phase that appeared in Blake back in the eighteenth century was an emotional belief in a perfect world in which men could live within absolute beauty, life, and love, if they so desired."[1] This faith of Blake's hurries the possessor beyond the world of sense into a world of the imagination and of the spirit. Not finding food enough on earth for its longing after beauty, love, and knowledge, it creates a realm beyond this earth, where sorrow is not, and where powers of genius shape the conceptions of imaginations. This realm was Blake's world, one far different from the material world. We see some of this longing for the immaterial world in many of the lovely verses of "The Land of Dreams". In one stanza Blake finds himself expressing it thus:

> "Father, O Father! What do we here
> In this land of unbelief and fear?
> The Land of Dreams is better far,
> Above the Light of Morning Star."[2]

This poem, "The Land of Dreams" is a cry for the broader and more spiritual life in which Blake so loved to live. He, long before Wordsworth, knew the happiness of the dream world and knew the horror of awakening from it to a world of reality.

An Interest in Nature.

As the true Romanticist that he was, Blake saw great beauty in nature; he used it in poetry descriptively and as a

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background for human life. He used it as a place of rest, where he could flee from society. He used it also as a place to reflect upon God, and upon life after death.

Using Nature Descriptively. Blake found great delight in birds, in flowers, in insects, and in English countryside which are ever present in his "Poetical Sketches", in his "Songs of Innocence" and his "Songs of Experience". The lark, the thrush, the odors of flowers, the gorgeously clothed flies, the mole, the ground spider, all this earthly life from the lark to the worm, on to man, had as limitless a depth and a capacity for Blake as it had for any other author, who was a true Romanticist. "The Poetical Sketches" actually marked an epoch in English Literature, for they were the first opening of a long sealed well of Romantic poetry. It was these poems of Blake, and not the works of Cowper or Thomson that seemed the true heralds of our modern descriptive poetry of nature and of enthusiasm.

Nature as a Background for Human Life Blake had a love for nature. He gave joy to others by portraying nature in his poems. He used nature as a background for human life, much as Burns and Shelley did.

It is when Blake passes to the flowers, the clouds, the hills, and into the world of human beings, that we find a realm of true beauty and helpfulness toward others. In

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"Thel", the first of Blake's "Prophetic Books" we find the spiritual beings of the Lily, the Cloud, and the Clod of Clay answering Thel, the beautiful daughter of Seraphim, when she complains to them of her being of no use in the world. As each speaks to her in turn, each seems to change her world of pain into a happier world of life and love. The Lily of the Valley says:

".....I am a watery weed,
And I am very small, and love to dwell in
lowly vale;
So weak, the gilded butterfly scarce perches
on my head.
Yet I am visited from Heaven; and He that
smiles on all
Walks in the valley, and each morn over me
spreads His hand."

The Cloud advises Thel thus:

"O Virgin, know'st thou not our steeds drink
of the golden springs,
Where Luvah doth renew his horses? .....
Unseen descending weigh my light wings upon
balmy flowers,
And court the fair-eyed Dew to take me to her
shining tent."

The Clod of Clay raised her pitying head and said:

"My bosom of itself is cold and of itself is
dark;
But He that loves the lowly, pours His Oil
upon my head.
And kisses me, and binds His nuptial bands
around my breast."[1]

Throughout his entire treatment of this natural world in poetry, Blake treats never of the senses as many other poets

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Nature as a Solitude. Blake became impatient of restrained beauty and went to nature to escape from conventional restraint and at the same time to practice the art of revery. He found in nature a place to enhance his emotions, to think, to imagine. Nature gave him an intoxicated sense of independence. Nature was a solace at a time when he failed to find a companion in the society of men.

We find in his "Song"[1] from "Poetical Sketches" how the clear winding stream where the linnet piped his song became the place where Blake practiced his art of revery in these lines:

"I'll drink of the clear stream,
And hear the linnet's song,
And there I'll lie and dream
The day along."

In another "Song" he says:

"I love the laughing vale,
I love the echoing hill
Where mirth does never fail,
And the jolly swain laughs his fill."[2]

"The Laughing Song"[3] from "The Songs of Innocence" shows a freedom from care and worry in the joys found in the green woods.

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 9
2. Ibid., p. 8
3. Ibid., p. 53

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 9
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3. Ibid., p. 22

Blake's own sense of freedom and his enjoyment of it, makes him exasperated when he sees restraint on all sides. He shows it in these lines:

"A Robin Redbreast in a cage
Puts all heaven in a rage." [1]

and

"A dove-house filled with doves and pigeons
Shudders hell through all its regions."

Too, because men treated Blake as a dreamer he was forced more and more from the society of men into solitude.

Nature an Abode for Deity. Blake was consistently religious in his attitude toward landscape. When he wished to speak with God he did not retire into his closet but fell into an inarticulate ecstacy before the wonders of nature. There were times when Blake invited both his body and soul to loaf. At these times he reads into nature an unutterable love. He sees shining through its finite forms the light of the Infinite. Seeing beauty in nature Blake sees the Infinite. For with Schelling we must agree that, "Beauty is a finite rendering of the Infinite."[2] If one were to ask how this rendering were brought about one would probably say through

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1. Yeats, W. B., Proverbs, p. 96
2. Babbitt, Irving, Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 289

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the medium of the symbol. Therefore is beauty a symbolical representation of the Infinite. "All poetry", says Schegel, "is an everlasting symbolizing."[1] In Blake's "Book of Thel",[2] we find this symbolical representation of the Infinite.

Blake had an exclusive thirst for the Infinte. "What is finite", he once said, in middle life, "has no value for me."

A Recognition of Children.

Blake, the Romanticist, had not only a love of a dream world and an interest in nature, but also an interest in children. He recognized the sacredness of the home and felt that children were the flower of the home. He felt that the child was also an important member of society. "A Cradle Song" from his "Songs of Innocence" shows in the following words a tenderness we all feel for the very small infant.

> "Sweet sleep, with soft down
> Weave thy brows an infant crown!
> Sweet sleep, angel mild,
> Hover o'er my happy child!"[3]

Many of the poems in "Songs of Experience"[4] also show the extremely important part Blake has given children in English poetry.[5]

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1. Babbitt, Irving, Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 289
2. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 169
3. Ibid., p. 53
4. Ibid., pp. 70, 68, 71, 76, 80, 81, 83
5. Brooke-Stopford, Studies in Poetry, p. 31

the medium of the symbol. Therefore is beauty a symbolical representation of the Infinite. "All poetry", says Dobsegel, "is an overlasting symbolizing."[1] In Blake's "Book of Thel",[2] we find this symbolical representation of the Infinite.

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A Recognition of Lower Animals.

Not only does Blake elevate the place of the child in poetry, but he places the love and pity for animals on a much higher plane than it had ever been placed before. The tender song of "The Lamb" mingles its life with the life of children.[1] His tenderness goes further than either Burns' or Cooper's in that, through his mysticism, Blake's animals, spiritually at one with man and God, become a part of the living universe as visible symbols of invisible realities. As an example of this, we have in "The Little Girl Found"[2] from his "Songs of Experience", Lyca's parents seeking their lost child. They suddenly come upon a lion which frightens them at first by the way he stalks around the sleeping Lyca. Later on in the poem we learn that Lyca had been shielded from all danger by this crouching lion, which watches the fold of humanity when the sheep of the Great Shepherd are sleeping. Again in "A Dream" we see that the lower order of animals has a place in Blake's scheme of things, for the emmet that had lost its way in the dark, is herein being guided to safety by the light of a firefly.

An Anti-Nature Tendency.

Even though Blake was interested in nature as a background for human life and for its own sake, we must say, for

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all practical purposes, Blake was at the same time the poet of anti-nature. Against nature he set a certain entity which he called Imagination, by which he meant the eternal images of things. You might kill all the lambs in the world but you could not kill the Lamb of the imagination, which to Blake was the Lamb of God.[1] Blake's philosophy in brief was primarily the assertion that the imagination is more trustworthy, that the ideal is more actual than the real.

Besides these defects in his naturalism there are evidences of confused thought as when in some of his poems he praises nature as the source of energy and of innocent enjoyment while in other poems, nature stands for the rigid restraint of rational law. It is in "Milton" and in "Jerusalem" that we find this rigid restraint of rational law which marks the antithesis of the imaginative law and inspiration. In both these books Blake labors to create a myth about man who suffers creation, who suffers a falling from the spiritual into a mortal life, and who suffers as he passes through various states for which Blake denied that he or anyone else was morally responsible. Blake asserted that "only by the death of 'the vegetable nature' can man re-awaken to the reality of the eternal life or the imagination."[2] He felt that sex, crime, creation, and redemption would vanish

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and cease; that all was to be merged into the unity of pure imagination and that imagination would be God. In brief, Blake was asserting that the ideal is more actual than the real. Many of Blake's engravings become intelligible if we keep this principle in mind.

A Recognition of the Past.

In his recognition of the past Blake had a deep love and interest for the older poets. He had a love of Celtic heroes and their thrilling adventures.

A Love for the Older Poets. Blake's imagination needed distance so he went back to the past. He found Milton, Spenser, Chaucer, and Shakespeare of much more value to him than the contemporary poets or those who came immediately before him. Blake in his youth took these older poets as his models, for he thought the poets of his own time were at a point of stagnation. Mason and Hayley, his contemporaries, were the high priests of the muses, while the poets of the Jermingham and Charlotte Smith type were their satellites. Blake found no inspiration among his contemporaries, but he did enjoy studying Milton of the seventeenth century. In his very earliest poems, "The Poetical Sketches", one finds traces of Milton, whose influence he cultivated at the very end of his career as well as the beginning. In Blake's day Milton was remembered and imitated but his verbal magnificence had become an involved pomposity and his intense and sensitive

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rhythms were smoothed out in "correct decasyllabics".[1] Blake reversed this by simplifying the verbiage and involving the metre. Shakespeare had abolished the rhyme in the theatre; Milton had done the same for the epic. Now Blake took the same step for the lyric and wrote a number of pieces, in substance, after the style of Collins but neo-Miltonic in manner. Besides these he tried to smooth the subtle metres which seemed to change before his eyes at the whim of every mood.

Blake was at one with Collins, Gray, and Thomas Warton, who imitated a reversion to Spenser and Shakespeare. While Gray marked a transition in his poetry, Blake went with one bound back to the Elizabethans of a still earlier period. From the models he found there, he wrote such lyrics as these:

"My silks and fine array
My smile and languished air,
By love are driven away;
And mournful lean Despair
Brings me yew to deck my grave:
Such end true lovers have."[2]

It is interesting to note how thoroughly Shakespearian Blake is, in manner and subject matter, as one reads the conversation between the Black Prince and Sir John Chandos in his "King Edward III". He has the Black Prince say:

"Methink the shout begins, the battle burns;
Methinks I see them perch in English crests,

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1. Damon, S. Foster, William Blake - His Philosophy and Symbols, pp. 27-28
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And roar the wild flame of fierce
war upon
The thronged enemy!"

He has Chandos reply in true Shakespearian style:

"Age is contemplative; each rolling
year
Brings forth fruit to the mind's
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While vacant youth doth crave and
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Within itself and findeth discontent."

Where Marlowe ended his dramatic fragment of King Edward III, Blake took up the thread. In doing so, Blake may have lost some of the melody of Marlowe but at least, he wasn't afraid to try it as so many before him were afraid to do. Marlowe may not be so distinct in this, but there is in it a certain similarity to Shakespeare, whom Blake loved and studied to good purpose.

Blake at times begins a poem with a reminiscence of Shakespeare or of Spenser only to drift into the manner of Poe. In the following poem, "Song" we might say he is standing midway between Shakespeare and Poe.

"Memory, hither come
And tune your merry notes;
And, while upon the wind
Your music floats,
I'll pore upon the stream
Where sighing lovers dream,
And fish for fancies as they pass
Within the watery glass."[1]

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"I'll drink of the clear stream,
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And there I'll lie and dream
The day along:
And when night comes, I'll go
To places fit for woe,
Walking along the darkened valley
With silent Melancholy."[1]

Blake encouraged young poets to copy the greater poets. He has been known to have said, "a bad artist seems to copy a great deal, and a great artist copies a great deal."[2] Yet while Blake has copied, he has also originated. When he originated, he abandoned himself to every natural feeling. He seemed to have a genius and a power; he seemed to see beauty everywhere and to hear music all about him. His own original poems are the first real soundings of the modern lyric in its most natural delight and in its sorrow. We note also, as he leaves the Elizabethan melodies for his own he anticipates a simplicity and a pathos found later in Wordsworth and a daring and a subtlety found in Shelley. If Shelley could have changed the metre of Blake's "To Morning"[3] into his own melody it would be like one of his own lyrics that embody the nature myths of the early world. The four poems addressed to "The Seasons"[4] retain the impersonation in which Spenser so often delighted, yet they are closer in their modernity to the impersonation of Keats in his "Ode to

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Autumn"[1] than they are to Spenser.[2] Even though one might wish to apologize for some of Blake's poetry often so difficult to interpret, one need not, for the best things have not fallen short of the large utterance of Elizabethan dramatists, the pastoral beauty of Wordsworth, and the fire of Shelley, or even the lyrical tenderness of Tennyson. Thus while Blake returns to the Elizabethans for his inspiration and song patterns, he seems to have paved the way for those who are to follow him. Sensing the future as he does, causes one to think of him more as a nineteenth century poet than an eighteenth century poet.

A Love for Celtic Heroes. Going back into the past brought about a revival of the medieval ballad and the age of chivalry. Macpherson, by adding a few of his own ideas, had changed many of Ossian's original chivalric tales, then called them his own. Blake went to Macpherson to read Ossian, for he loved Ossian and the great Celtic adventurers of his thrilling tales. The cloudy raw supernaturalism of Ossian was extremely appealing to him. So was Ossian's technique. Blake thought he saw possibilities in making metre more subtle by following Macpherson's method of writing unrhymed metres as prose. Such experiments were seen in "The Passions", a book never published. He retained the Ossianic septenary yet

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The Part Romanticism Plays in his Engravings

In art as in literature, Blake showed a love of a dream world, an interest in nature, an interest in animals, and an interest in the past and the future.

His Love of a Dream World in Art.

As Blake proved himself a Romanticist in his poetry so he proved himself a Romanticist in his art. The shortest road of escape from any hard world is into oneself, to lead the life of imagination and of dream, an escape into an ivory

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tower, it is often called. While Botticelli, Giorgione, El Greco, and Watteau occur to us as so many adepts at reverie, Blake, summoned from his ivory tower, occurs to us as a most imposing dreamer. In Blake's exalted art, we find little weakness, no casual reverie of the dream type. There have been many artists of this mystical type of the Romantic School. There are Ferdinand Knopf the Belgian, Redon the late Parisian, and Munch the Norwegian, yet none of these men seem in any way comparable to Blake in power and attractiveness.[1] Blake's hallucinations, which daily presented themselves to his inner eye were crystal clear. He spoke in familiar terms with the apostles, with the long dead English kings and queens. Even the visions he had for the future, strange and beautiful as they might be, had always a complete lucidity. The clarity and the hardness of this genuine mystic seems very unlike that of the soft and self-indulgent dreamer of the Watteau type. "The Morning Stars Sang Together", an engraving from Blake's "Book of Job" shows the complete clarity and precision of his method. Here where he seems most mystical he is least vague; he commands his dream in each situation. He has a capacity to maintain a calmness and a remarkable integrity in face of actual hallucination which makes him spiritually the superior of most artists of this dream type.

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1. Gardner, Charles. William Blake: The Man. p. 55

Drawing by William Blake
Raphael conversing with Adam and Eve

An Interest in Nature.

In his engravings as well as in his poems, Blake makes reference through symbols to the world of nature. He uses nature as a background for human life.

Nature a Background for Life. In his reference to the world of nature, Blake never makes an appeal through the senses, but always through the spirit. He uses nature as a background for human life in "Raphael and Adam in Conversation with Eve Ministering to them." This is an engraving from the "Paradise Lost" series. Blake here seems to translate the commonest appearances of nature into spiritual idioms. Here we find Eden, its tree with ripened fruit and a serpent coiling itself spirally about its trunk. On the plain at the base of a low hill, animals of various descriptions are roving about. "Delicate flowers cover the earth while benches and a table for the celestial feast spring up from the ground in Gothic forms as if growing naturally. In a setting of this kind are placed Adam, Eve, and the Angel Raphael, possessing a beauty of proportion and a purity of outline which the Greeks would easily have recognized. The architecture of the design is emphasized by the magnificent curve of Raphael's wing, forming a beautiful ogee arch and by the arch of palms and floral sprays within which stands the gracious Eve."[1]

1. Cary, Luther E., William Blake and His Water Colors, p. 50

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In these Eden pictures the color is eloquent of a mildness embodied in these fair tranquil outlines. There are soft pale greens, violets, and blues delicately separated yet producing a fused impression of glad sweet color ever so little hushed to reflect the prophecy of danger in the visit of the angel. The design has been conceived in one mood without loss of energy and carried out into another without forced symbolism.

Nature a Place for Deity. Blake, in his interest in nature, used it as a background for human beings, but he also used it as a place for Deity. In his engravings of the "Book of Job" we find God visiting Job. Job may have gone out into the forest to pray; he may have gone on the mountain top or in the wheat fields. Job in his conversations with the Deity are usually out in nature where he can find peace and consolation in his prayers.

It is curious to notice how this love of Nature began shyly to lift its head during the age of rationalism, the so-called "prosaic" eighteenth century. The parallelism of dates in this century between poets and painters is striking. Thomson, author of "The Seasons", was born in seventeen hundred, and Wilson, the first important landscape painter only fourteen years later. Collins, with a true sylvan note in his song, is almost exactly contemporary with Gainsborough, while Blake, born in seventeen hundred fifty seven, shines as

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a double star in the firmament of the second half of the century.

An Anti-Nature Tendency in Art. As Blake had an anti-nature tendency noticeable in his poems, of which we have already spoken, so he had an anti-nature tendency in his engraving. His philosophy in art was the assertion that the imagination is more trustworthy, that the ideal is more actual than the real.[1] Knowing this we understand why Blake felt that the imagination had outline, when nature itself does not have it. This may have been the reason why in his engravings his female figures were often exaggerated in the direction of their forms; they often swing upon big hips. They let out and loosened long and luxuriant hair. As the women appeared too womanish, so his men often appeared too athletic, and his very old men too preposterously old. These were mental impressions so naturally were not as accurate as an impression from a model. Even if he did exaggerate, he did not do it by distortion, as many of the decadent mystics did.

An Interest in the Past in Blake's Art.

As Blake went back into the past for his Elizabethan song patterns, so he looked to the Middle Ages for his motifs to justify the reverence he held for engraving. Having

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1. Cary, E. L., William Blake and His Water Color Drawings, pp. 41-42

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1. Gary, H. L., William Blake and his Water Color Drawings. Pp. 41-42

studied with Flaxman he began with the flatness of the Florentines for these were what Flaxman cherished. He added to this his memories of the recumbent effigies of Gothic tombs he had visited and studied at Westminster Abbey. Gothic architecture, to Blake, was as intoxicating a revelation as the discovery of Michelangelo and Dürer in the sales-rooms of Christie and Langford. It seemed that Gothic architecture sank its spirit inwards upon his soul and kept reappearing again and again in the architectural fragments of his own designs. From the time Blake attended Mr. Pars' School in the Strand he had copied plaster casts and plaster bits of the human body. His education in art probably was more surely advanced from his desultory wanderings in sale rooms and in private galleries of noblemen.

Blake was greatly influenced in his own art by Flaxman's classicism. It was Flaxman who taught him to avoid foreshortening and perspective; incidentally to avoid the foreshortening of Rubens and Veronese. For Flaxman high art was flat art; everything, he thought could be done by pure line upon a single plane. Above all, that line must never falter and come to nothing. This principle of Flaxman's became the firmest of Blake's principles. Blake loved, most in art, as had Flaxman, that lucidity and decision of outline that can be seen best in the Elgin marbles and the simpler designs of Michelangelo. The thing he disliked most was

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what we now call Impressionism, the sacrifice of form to tint, the cloudland of the mere colorist.

While he followed Flaxman, he also had much in common with Hogarth. Both denounced the art of their day. Blake, as had Hogarth, called it a deception to place a model before him and to paint it as he saw it. Blake felt that to do that was "no better than any other manual labor; anybody might do it and the fool will do it best, as it is a work of no mind."[1] Blake, who had never studied anatomy used this, I believe, as his reason for not copying a model. The fact was that he was not able to do it well. It was easier to make his figures engines of emotion. By making them abstractions he subordinated the facial expression to his design. Blake probably never had seen any good oil paintings of the Flemish School, but holding them to be the source of the art of his day, he had denounced them with violence. Had not Rubens and Rembrandt sacrificed the intellectual outline to indefinite lights and shadows? Had they not renounced imaginative things for what seemed to him nothing but unimaginative copying of corporeal life and lifeless matter? Were they not enemies of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Dürer? So they were his enemies. Blake was really making in a blind hopeless sort of way, something of the same protest made

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1. Craven, Thomas, Men of Art, p. 363

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afterwards by the pre-Raphaelites with more success.

A Modern Tendency in his Idea of Nature in Art.

Blake seems in his idea of nature to have been a hundred years ahead of his time, for at the beginning of the nineteenth century he was urging upon the world the ideas to which, at the beginning of the twentieth century we only gradually are now becoming accustomed. He had been heard to ask, "Shall painting be confined to sordid drudgery of facsimile representations of merely mortal and perishing substances and not be as poetry and music are, elevated into its own proper sphere of invention and visionary conception?"[1] His answer was "No, it shall not be so! Painting as well as poetry and music exists and exalts in immortal thoughts." Painting, poetry, and music Blake called "the powers of man conversing with Paradise", and when he took up a pencil or a graver he said he was "drunk with intellectual vision."[2] This intellectual vision is the link that binds him to the band of modern artists who are rejecting even such degree of "facsimile interpretation"[1] as the precursors of Impressionism retained and who seek emotional equivalents for the sights of the visible world. "They approach nature, as Blake did, to discover in it the raw material upon which their imagina-

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tion may work, to distil from it, the poetry of fresh relations and subtle harmonies of color, of line, of thought, and of form."[1] This intense reaction to nature is not less characteristic of Blake than of Cézanne and Van Gogh. Van Gogh after painting a portrait as faithfully as he can, instead of placing a stupid wall as a background, paints the infinite,- colors it a rich blue background, against which shines a girl's blond hair, as a star would against an azure sky. To see Nature in this way is to see it with the eyes of imagination, and Blake repeatedly has insisted that "to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself." Blake, "as our modern Cézanne, had reached that inner unity between the spirit of a subject and his own spirit, which actually corresponds to mysticism. Blake arrived at this unity through an impassioned contemplation he had with religious meditations."[1] It is exceedingly interesting to note that our eighteenth century idealist might actually have paved the way for our modern idealists, Cézanne and Van Gogh. It is a coincidence that all three treat nature through the spirit rather than through the senses.

In our study of Romanticism we have thus noted that Blake used many of its phases both in his poetry and in

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1. Duff, Esther E.. William Blake and His Water Colors. pp. 39-40

his engraving. He might then rightfully be called in every sense of the word, a true Romanticist.

III

THE ELEMENT OF EMOTION

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A Large Range of Emotion

The emotions have played an important part in both Blake's poetry and in his engravings. In his engravings, those elements which play the finer part are the energetic, the terrific, the splendid, and the majestic, while the softer emotions and the perception of what is gentle and lovely seem less prominent and are realized with less sureness and mastery. In his poetry these conditions are reversed. He expresses in poetry with final perfection, the innocent and simple impulses of human nature, such as the laughter of a baby, the devotion of a parent to its offspring, and the trust in a Father whom the eye has not seen.

In an effort to see how this is true let us turn to Milton's "Paradise Lost", his Bible Series, "The Book of Job", and Dante's "Divine Comedy", which are his finest engravings. In these engravings we find those stronger emotions of which we have spoken, while in his "Poetical Sketches" and "The Songs of Innocence" we shall find the softer emotions.

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The Stronger Emotions.

The nine designs of Milton's "Paradise Lost" possess an accurate and well-sustained execution. The style is grand, sweeping, and terse. Lest we have forgotten them, may we recall them by name. They are "The Creation of Eve"[1], "The Expulsion from the Garden"[2], "Satan with Adam and Eve"[3], "Raphael in Conversation with Adam and Eve"[4], "The Downfall of the Rebel Angels"[5], and "The Temptation of Eve".[6] The figures in each possess a dignity and a perfect poise. They have charm and great majesty.

The Biblical pictures possess both grandeur and majesty. Especially is this true of "The Ascension."[7] Here is great power and a dignity in the Christ clothed in white, rising with outspread arms in the midst of a bright light falling from Heaven. The angels flying headlong, point toward the light. The eleven apostles are below gazing upward, St. John standing to the right of Christ. The energy in the upward motion of the figure of Christ and the downward movement of the angels is admirably expressed. Although the expression on the faces of some of the apostles

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1. Engraving facing page 40
2. Engraving facing page 43
3. Engraving facing page 42
4. Engraving facing page 77
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6. Engraving facing page 41
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is grotesque, there is a sense of great feeling in each. "The Ascension" seems to reach sublimity.

"Moses and the Serpent" possesses an awfulness not soon forgotten. Its harshness of color and the weirdness of a three-headed serpent, that you can almost feel curling about your hand, probably give just the effect of awe Blake wished to have it give.

"The Last Judgment", a most elaborately planned treatment of the subject (with its hundreds of figures, some being directed downwards, others upwards), overpowers one as something terrific.

It was no mere chance that put it into Blake's head to illustrate the "Book of Job". He had been brought up on the Bible, was conscious of its amazing freshness and derived from it his incomparable power. Not only its beauty, not only its tragic significance did he make his own, but its sublime spirit. Occasionally in art we find that a continual striving after what is great and sublime, is apt to weary in the long run and grandeur often changes to the grandiose. But the engravings of "Job" contain a grandeur and a sublimity that will ever remain; they possess a loftiness that is so much a part of his being, that the ages cannot weary of it.

Exceptionally splendid are the very grand yet awful designs from Dante's "Divine Comedy", some of which were left

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unfinished at Blake's death. "Francesca and Paolo"[1], the most perfect, is the most moving. It has a beauty that is tender, yet quite august. Had Blake lived to finish the hundred odd drawings as he planned for Mr. Linnell, a friend of his, they might have been the crown of his labors.

Throughout all of these, his best engravings, one gets the feeling of the energetic, the terrific, the sublime, the majestic, and the splendid. The stronger ~~emotions~~ forces are at play.

The Softer Emotions.

Quite different is the feeling one gets in reading "The Poetical Sketches" and "Songs of Innocence", the finest of Blake's poems, which Wordsworth and Shelley said were the finest bits of English Literature ever published. Here is neither rhapsody nor ecstasy, no majesty nor sublimity, but a charm, a beauty, and a tenderness that surpasses all else. What poems in English literature have any more charm than the ones he wrote when only eleven years of age?

"How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld
Who in the sunny beams did glide."

and

"My silks and fine array,
My smiles and languished air,
By love are driven away,

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1. Figgis, Darrell, Dante by William Blake, Plate 92

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The Lesser Emotions.

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"How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the prince of love beheld
Who in the sunny beams did glide."

and

"My alike and line array,
My smiles and laughed air,
My love are driven away.

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1. Figgis, Darrell. Dante by William Blake, Plate 22

And mournful lean Despair
Brings me yew to deck my grave:
Such end true lovers have."

Starting with the first poem "To Spring"[1] and going through to the last we find many others in "Poetical Sketches" as exquisite as the above lines. There is delicacy in:

"Sweet dreams form a shade
O'er my lovely infant's head,
Sweet dreams of pleasant streams,
By happy silent moony beams."

There is a tenderness in lines from "The Lamb" and "The Shepherd" in these words:

"Little lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life and bid thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?"

and

"How sweet is the shepherd's sweet lot!
From the morn to the evening he strays;
He shall follow his sheep all the day,
And his tongue shall be filled with
praise."

There is a charm of scenery in "Night" from "The Songs of Innocence":

"The sun descending in the West,
The evening star does shine
The birds are silent in their nest,
And I must seek for mine.

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1. Yeats, W., B., Poems of William Blake, pp. 3-12

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, pp. 8-12

The moon like a flower
In heaven's high bower,
With silent delight,
Sits and smiles on the night."

There is beauty of word and of thought in these words from "The Book of Thel":

"The Lily of the Valley, breathing in the humble grass,
Answered the lovely maid and said, "I am a watery weed,
And I am very small, and love to dwell in lowly vale;
So weak, the gilded butterfly scarce perches on my head.
Yet I am visited from Heaven, and He that smiles on all
Walks in the valley, and each morn, over me spreads His hand,
Saying, 'Rejoice, thou humble grass, thou new-born lily flower,
Thou gentle maid of silent valleys - of modest brooks,
For thou shalt be clothed in light, and fed with morning manna,
Till summer's heat melts thee beside the fountains and the springs,
To flourish in eternal vales.'"

As we continue on with his later poetic works we notice how his verse becomes more and more involved with the greater amount of symbolism and mysticism he incorporates. Yet the charm of scenery, the beauty of word and thought seem to vanish in these later works.

Throughout our entire study of emotions, we can readily see that while the majestic, the terrific, and the sublime play the important part in his finest engravings, the tender, the graceful, the peaceful, and the beautiful play the important part in his finest poetry.

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Ignoring of the Feelings of Individuals

We readily note that Blake ignores almost totally actual life and its evolution, and that he ignores the feelings of individuals in the society in which he travels. He wholly ignores the complicated interests of practical life and the influences they have upon our characters. Nowhere are there references made to them.

Raging Over Injustices

As Evidenced in his Poetry.

His "Songs of Innocence." But when there are certain injustices and wrongs existing in the world at large, Blake becomes enraged. He feels he must speak, he must be heard. So in "Asia" one of his Prophetic Books, Blake has the despots of Europe get their own way with the people, whom they dominate. Blake pours forth wrath in presenting his thesis. In vigorous language he says:

> "And the Kings of Asia stood,-
> And cried in bitterness of soul
> Shall not the king call for Famine from the Heath,
> And the priest for pestilence from the fen,
> To restrain, to dismay, to thin
> The inhabitants of mountain and plain?"

Pain, anguish, and loss of faith are keenly expressed

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in his poems "Holy Thursday"[1], "The Chimney Sweeper"[2], and "London"[3], from his "Songs of Experience".

Blake displays a passion for liberty for mankind as against a passion for liberty for one's own countrymen. He does this in "America", in which he takes the "War of Independence" as his theme. He spares not the angels of Albion who fight against the angels of the states. It is interesting to note that in his love for liberty for all mankind, he closely resembles Coleridge and Wordsworth.

Even more bitterness is expressed in "Lafayette" wherein the king and queen of France consult each other as to what they should do about bringing the people to obedience. They decide to call out the army to eat the food of Paris, so that the people of the town may starve and come to terms. Incidentally one recalls that to Shelley as well as to Blake, the king and the priest were types of the oppressor. To Blake, however, love seemed enslaved to moral law more subtly than to Shelley. Life in England as pictured by Blake seemed a life of disguise and deceit veiling us always from the beams of the Eternal. Blake's attack on priest craft, on its religion of terror and restraint, on the inhuman God it made, on the dogmatic creeds by which it kept men slaves, is equally

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 67
2. Ibid., p. 71
3. Ibid., p. 77

In his poems "Holy Thursday"[1], "The Chimney Sweeper"[2], and "London"[3], from his "Songs of Experience".

Blake displays a passion for liberty for mankind as against a passion for liberty for one's own countrymen. He does this in "America", in which he takes the "Spir. of Independence" as his theme. He spares not the angels of Albion who fight against the angels of the states. It is interesting to note that in his love for liberty for all mankind, he closely resembles Coleridge and Wordsworth.

Even more bitterness is expressed in "Lafayette" wherein the King and queen of France consult each other as to what they should do about bringing the people to obedience. They decide to call out the army to eat the food of Paris, so that the people of the town may starve and come to terms. Incidentally one recalls that to Shelley as well as to Blake, the King and the priest were types of the oppressor. To Blake, however, love seemed enslaved to moral law more subtly than to Shelley. Life in England as pictured by Blake seemed a life of disguise and deceit veiling us always from the beams of the Eternal. Blake's attack on priest craft, on its religion of terror and restraint, on the inhuman God it made, on the dogmatic creeds by which it kept man slaves, is equally

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 67
2. Ibid., p. 71
3. Ibid., p. 77

Death of the First Born

Pestilence - From the Plagues of Egypt Series

vigorous.

In "Little Boy Lost" from his "Songs of Experience" Blake directs a blow at the cruelty of a religion which replaces natural love by authority as a basis of religion in these words:

"And Father, how can I love you
Or any of my brothers more?
I love you like the little bird
That picks up crumbs around the door."

The priest slays the child because it has said it loves its father not because it is told to do so, but out of its own heart. This strain in Blake is like the temper of Shelley. Blake felt that this humility which the priest wished to inculcate within the child was one of the vices of a false religion, as tending to destroy proper self respect and regard for the truth.

As Evidenced in his Engravings.

A Treatment of Harrowing Incidents. Starvation, misery, harlotry, and cruelty to children,- all that concerned the state - were Blake's interests at a time when no one felt or thought much about them. Some of his engravings as well as his poems exhibit these feelings toward conditions existing in Asia and in Europe. Among his engravings are "Famine"[1], "Plague",

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1. Engraving facing page 94

vigorous.

In "Little Boy Lost" from his "Songs of Experience" Blake directs a blow at the cruelty of a religion which replaces natural love by authority as a basis of religion in these words:

> "And father, how can I love you
> Or any of my brothers more?
> I love you like the little bird
> That flies in the summer around the door."

The priest slays the child because it has said it loves its father nor because it is told to do so, but out of its own heart. This attack in Blake is like the temper of Shelley. Blake felt that this reality which the priest wished to induce within the child was one of the vices of a false religion, as leading to destroy proper self respect and regard for the truth.

As Evidenced in his Engravings.

A Treatment of Harrowing Incidents. Starvation, misery, barbarity, and cruelty to children,- all that concerned the state - were Blake's interests at a time when no one felt or thought much about them. Some of his engravings as well as his poems exhibit these feelings toward conditions existing in Asia and in Europe. Among his engravings are "Famine"[1], "Plague",

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1. Engraving facing page 94

Famine - From the Plagues of Egypt Series -

and "Pestilence"[1] from the "Plagues of Egypt" series, and although they seem to portray the life of the early Jews, they are really symbolical of the happenings in the Europe and the Asia of that day. They are positively harrowing. Among his poems are "London"[2], "The Chimney-Sweeper"[3], "A Little Boy Lost"[4], "The Will and the Way"[5] and "Holy Thursday".[6] The poems are not so harrowing as the engravings.

"Pestilence"[7], one of these engravings, sometimes called "Death to the First Born", portrays a light striding, passionless, blue, scaly, demon strewing bereavement as he passes among human beings. His great arms are lifted and from them there seems to flow a malignant influence upon terrified and roving people who faint in utter loveliness of Blake's rhythmic line. Light blue and gray flashes stream from the demon's figure and a flaming orange torch on his head dims the ray of light from the tiny yellow torches of the town. It is interesting to note how every line of the composition has its place in dramatic effect and color harmony which is built on the complimentaries, blue and orange. It is a glorious structure with its muted yellows and greens, glorious because against this blue demon of terror with mocking face of orange eyes and orange hair, suggestive of flames, echo the flowing

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1. Engraving facing page 93
2. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 77
3. Ibid., p. 71
4. Ibid., p. 80
5. Ibid., p. 120
6. Ibid., p. 67
7. Engraving facing page 93

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1. Engraving facing page 95
2. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 77
3. Ibid., p. 71
4. Ibid., p. 80
5. Ibid., p. 120
6. Ibid., p. 87
7. Engraving facing page 95

lines of the delicate figures in the foreground.

"Famine"[1] is interpreted with the same scrupulous care for appropriate color and for the same inspired insight. Where Pestilence speaks of sudden terrors and angry storms, Famine speaks of a slowly waning vitality and a creeping decline. The lines of the figures in "Famine" are long and straight,- a few curves are visible in a stone arch which appears somewhat like a tomb. In the distance are stern lines of a blue hill, greying into a cold violet below and rising to a light flickering yellow. Here is no hint of force, yet the details are terrible enough, for a man near the tomb strips flesh from the arm of a corpse with his teeth and a child seeks nourishment from its dead mother, while in the background a woman paces with the gesture of madness. These bits of horror seem to be absorbed in a kind of repellent impression of death and exhaustion.

"Plague", of this same series, is well known because of its frequent reproductions. An inexplicable woe hovers over it; a sense of tragic culmination,- a doom settles over one as he views the straight black lines of the pall and the bier, the mother falling from her husband's embrace with her dying child, one fair corpse scarcely earthed in the foreground and the black funereal reek of a distant fire which consumes

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1. Engraving facing page 94

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1. Surveying facing page 94.

Comus Illustration

The Parents Welcoming Their Children

we know not what unseen horror. It is enough to excite the imagination of the greatest historical painter, yet Blake was only thirty years old when he did it.

To neutralize these unhappy exhibits we might turn to the only moment when Blake seems gay. That moment is in Milton's "Comus"[1]. "Comus" seems to illustrate not only the poem Milton wrote, but Blake's own share of comic spirit at play in a congenial way. In these engravings the gayety never seems to be irresponsible gayety. It is gayety carefully planned and regulated.

Of the aforementioned poems, "Holy Thursday" speaks of the starvation suffered by orphans and by the poor of wealthy England who are

> ".....reduced to misery
> Fed with cold and usurous hand."

Misery is suggested in "The Chimney Sweeper", from the "Songs of Experience", who toils for a pittance long hours of the hot day in an honest effort to clean rich men's chimneys. Blake wonders if because the sweep smiles and is joyful, England feels he suffers no pain - no injury. He says it in this way:

> ".....because I am happy and dance and sing,
> They think they have done me no injury,
> And are gone to praise God and His priest
> and king,
> Who make up a heaven of our misery."[2]

Mention of the harlot's curse is found in "London", while refer-

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1. Engraving facing page 96
2. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 72

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ence to the cruelty of children is seen in "The Little Boy Lost."

So while we might say Blake cared nothing for the feelings of individuals about him in everyday life, he did care about mankind in general. He felt he must speak, so throughout both his poems and his engravings he tried to right the wrongs that were existing in his day. We cannot deny that the emotions played an important part in Blake's work.

IV

THE ELEMENT OF TECHNIQUE

THE ELEMENT OF TECHNIQUE

Lyricism, a Record of His Imagination

Psychology.

A Trust in the Inspiration of the Moment.

Blake's love of poetry seemed the very breath of his life to him; it revived the sources of his inspiration and was the mainspring of every significant thing that he achieved. Even though he violated so many traditional laws, his power of poetical imagination was remarkable and his writing on the inspiration of the moment unique.

An Immediacy of Impression.

When Blake had an image he sought above all things to give the impression of that image with immediacy, which really was the chief aim of his age to avoid. His age insisted upon polishing and repolishing a stanza after considerable time and deliberation had been spent on setting up an image. The reader of his images has a sense of something being hastily presented to him and again as hastily withdrawn. He snatches a meaning or else must miss it; for before he has time to think it out, another image has replaced the former one. Note the rapidity of images that arise in reading from "Auguries of Innocence":

"To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower;

THE ELEMENT OF TECHNIQUE

Lyricism, a Record of His Imagination

Revelatory.

A Tyrant in the Inspiration of the Moment.

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"To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower;

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour."[1]

The poems which rank as Blake's noblest performances in the way they quickly flash images before us are: "The Crystal Cabinet"[2], "The Mental Traveller"[3], "William Bond"[4], and "The Auguries of Innocence."[1]. These verbal images have an abruptness and a vividness but are left to explain themselves; Blake never tried to exhibit their meaning. In recording his poetical imagination Blake worked rapidly, never being known to go back over a poem to improve it.

His style.

In Blake's manner of writing poetry one finds a simplicity, a forcefulness of words and a rapidity in recording them, a sincerity in his verbal expression, and a consistency in expression.

A Simplicity. In poetry, Blake refused to adopt a pose. As he wrote rapidly, as the ideas came to his mind, he left them in written form, never going back over them to reconstruct phrases or to change them. He wished to write simply and in some of his poetry he did. Even though his later poems become complex in theme, he has never been known to gloss over

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1. Yeats, W. B., Poems of William Blake, p. 90
2. Ibid., p. 123
3. Ibid., p. 124
4. Ibid., p. 130

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2. Ibid., p. 128
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his effects, as so many of his contemporaries were in the habit of doing. The artificiality of these contemporaries displeased him very much. Collins could not more shake it off than Gray could shake off his over-self-contemplation. No matter what Blake saw in nature, or in his daily life, he refused, in writing about it, to gloss it over. "To the Muses" is one of his fine lyrics, in which he expresses his dismay at the decay of poetry in England, but cries out for the restoration of the poetry of the child-like simple passion, which among the ancient poets of England sprang to lovely life. In his "Poetical Sketches" we find the poem "Blind Man's Buff" which is pretty and playful, which is full of animation and which evinces a noble simplicity of mind and a healthy love of honest homely sports. Another exquisite bit of his simplicity is found in his "Birds", wherein one not only hears the poet but the birds themselves.

A Forcefulness of Words. There are some images to which Blake gave a terrible compressed force through the use of but a few select words. Note the force of the words in these lines from "The Tiger":

"What dread hand and what dread feet?
. . . . . .
In what furnace was thy brain?
. . . . . .
And what shoulder and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
. . . . . .
Did He who made the lamb make thee?"

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Not only did images flash rapidly before his mind, but he recorded those verbal images with a remarkable rapidity. One has to be alert to these ever-changing images or lose the continuity of the poem as a whole.

A Sincerity of Verbal Expression. Blake must speak because he has seen; he must express what he has seen exactly as he has seen it, clearly and accurately. He never dreamed of questioning the correctness and the veracity of his vision. What he thought, he saw, and it was this sudden and sharp crystallization of inward ideas into words which produced this impression on many readers that his reason was unseated. It was his honesty and sincerity in portraying that image exactly as he saw it that brought about this feeling on the part of the observers.

A Consistency of Expression. Through the varied handling of reason and of morality, of humility and of forgiveness in his poems, we find a marked consistency. His fragments no less than his entire books have revealed him as a spontaneous and an audacious writer, and a consistent thinker and poet. There is no part of his writings, no casual saying, no scribbled note on a margin of a book he had read, which is not a part of all the rest. An absolute unity of character and of purpose runs through all his work. Those who know him through a careful study of his works are ready to acknowledge him as a consistent thinker and a great poet.

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Metrics.

A Disobedience
to Metrical Laws. The couplet was the traditional expression of the day. True, Blake wrote couplets, but he was happiest when disobedient to metrical laws, and to the laws of grammar. He often dared to rhyme for pleasure, often putting down any couplet that came to his pen. Yet somehow the life and the soul of lyrical effect is assured to him by his very carelessness. Blake recognized no law; he felt that all good things are the gifts of the spirit, so trusted that the impulse that began a poem would end it. If it did not, that poem would simply be left unfinished. In spite of this carelessness, he wrote many perfect lyrics, some of which are the best poems of "The Songs of Experience". He shows a true lyrical gift and a literary finish in the very excellent poems called "The Poetical Sketches".

Pictorial Design

Psychology.

A Record of Blake's
Artistic Imagination. Even though Blake violated the laws of metre and the laws of grammar and trusted to that very flimsy school of inspiration, he had a poetical imagination that had a clarity, a purity, and an honesty that has led people to believe he was genuine and sincere. For his pictorial imagination we can say almost the same. His genuine-

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ness and sincerity in art seemed to be developed to quite as high a degree as his sincerity in poetry.

Originality in Engraving. As Blake chose to use his own metres in poetry, so he chose to invent his own process of engraving. He called this new process illuminated printing. The style of Basire, a former teacher, laid the foundation if his practice in engraving, which was dry and solid and fitted for the realization of strong and abstract pictorial thinking. Blake wrote a poem in reverse with an impervious liquid - (varnish composed of pitch and turpentine) - upon a copper plate. He plunged this plate into an acid bath, until the naked parts of it were eaten down, leaving the coated letters of the drawing in relief like printer's type. With ink and roller the copies were printed. After the copies had been printed in black and white, flat water colors were added by hand, and sometimes gilt. These were then bound together by hand in a sheaf. If one were fortunate enough to see the form and the language that Blake originated one would see lyrical poetry defined by its relation to engravings. Blake had worked with Basire for seven years. At the age of twenty he was a skilled engraver. In his engraving there seems to be nothing fumbled or accidental. He admitted at the outset that when confronted with nature he could do nothing. With this "vegetable world", as he called it, he wasn't concerned.

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David and Goliath - Bible Illustation -

His pictures were intended to be viewed as imaginative works of art. Wilenski says, "with a few exceptions his works are the work of a man weak in pictorial imagination and generally insincere in the expression of his mind."[1] What Wilenski means by Blake's being weak in pictorial imagination is this, that except for the ten best of Dante's "Divine Comedy", (pictures engraved in his last years) Blake was "unable to visualize a picture as a coherent, as a consistent unity and whole before he began his work," that he did not trust in his own inspiration for the entire design but resorted to a labored placing of figures and objects about his pictorial image in order to make it a more perfect unit - or what he thought was a perfect unit. One is led to believe this to be true to some extent. Blake did give us in one drawing a figure which echoes Giotto or Fra Angelico, hard by another in the style of Reynolds or Romney. In another drawing a Michelangelo athlete rubs shoulders with a figure in the style of Flaxman, from whom Blake took his early training in engraving. In an isolated one like "David and Goliath"[2] we find the figure of David expressing what one might call a Giotto-Fra Angelico streak in Blake and a figure of Goliath, which seems a real bogy-man, expressing Blake's "streak of numbo-jumbo."[3] This latter might be called none

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1. Wilenski, R. H., "William Blake as an Artist", Apollo Magazine, p. 261
2. "David and Goliath", engraving facing page 104
3. Wilenski, R. H., "William Blake as an Artist", Apollo Magazine, p. 262

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1. Wilenski, R. H., "William Blake as an Artist", Apollo Magazine, p. 251
2. "David and Goliath", engraving facing page 104
3. Wilenski, R. H., "William Blake as an Artist", Apollo Magazine, p. 252

other than his own pictorial imagining. So far what Wilenski says seems to be true. The same seems to be true about his composition and the relation of his figures to other parts in the picture. Gothic Renaissance, and Baroque jostle one another and if we accept one set of symbols the rest of the picture becomes unreadable. What seems to have happened in Blake's case was that he found he could not translate large parts of his picture to pictorial terms. When this happened, he turned to his portfolios where he would find the missing figure or the details required to complete the sketch. In his portfolios he had engravings after Raphael, Michelangelo, Giotto, and masters of the Gothic times up to the Renaissance. His own images of draped figures seemed very much like those of the laymen of his day,- those of the Reynolds' type.[1] These he labored to replace with others more in keeping with the art which he admired. "In combining the two," Wilenski says, "an astonishing mosaic of incongruities is the result." One does not readily agree with Wilenski at this point. Grant it, that Blake labored to bring about a certain result, yet that result was usually a lovely piece of work. Grant it, that Blake used many and sundry objects to embellish his backgrounds, yet he never failed to gather them together with a great orderliness, a feeling of quiet and peacefulness.

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1. Wilenski, R. H., "William Blake the Artist", Apollo Magazine, pp. 260-261

other than his own pictorial imagining. So far what Wilenski says seems to be true. The same seems to be true about his composition and the relation of his figures to other parts in the picture. Gothic Renaissance, and Baroque jostle one another and if we accept one set of symbols the rest of the picture becomes unreadable. What seems to have happened in Blake's case was that he found he could not translate large parts of his picture to pictorial terms. When this happened, he turned to his portfolios where he would find the missing figure or the details required to complete the sketch. In his portfolios he had engravings after Raphael, Michelangelo, Giotto, and masters of the Gothic times up to the Renaissance. His own images of draped figures seemed very much like those of the layman of his day,- those of the Reynolds' type.[1] These he labored to replace with others more in keeping with the art which he admired. "In combining the two," Wilenski says, "an astonishing mosaic of incongruities is the result." One does not readily agree with Wilenski at this point. Grant it, that Blake labored to bring about a certain result, yet that result was usually a lovely piece of work. Grant it, that Blake used many and sundry objects to embellish his backgrounds, yet he never failed to gather them together with a great orderliness, a feeling of quiet and peacefulness.

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1. Wilenski, R. H., "William Blake the Artist", Apollo Magazine, pp. 280-281

Never was there confusion or chaos.

Take for instance his "Raphael Conversing with Adam and Eve"[1] from "Paradise Lost Series." Notice the details in the background and in the foreground! A serpent winds itself about a tree on the hill-top. Several kinds of animals are leisurely browsing in what seems like a Garden of Eden. Elephants drink from the streams bordered by palm trees. The very chairs on which Adam and Raphael sit seem to rise right out of the ground! Palm trees curl their leaves in graceful curves above the heads of all three figures. Raphael wears a jeweled crown, but even this is not a sufficient adornment for such as he. Blake surrounds his head and upper part of his body in a "halo" of an ogee-arch shape, from which radiates similar arches converging toward a pointed top likening the whole unto a Gothic structure. True there is much Blake has added to his central theme - which in this picture is the coming of Raphael to warn Adam and Eve -, yet no one can say that these exteriors distract the attention from the main theme; rather do they enhance its beauty. They give it an added grandeur and solemnity, with no trace of confusion or disorder anywhere. The same can be said for his "Last Judgment" of a thousand odd figures, half of which are being hurled down into the depths of despair while the other half are

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lifted Heavenward. With all its movement (the writhing and agony of the bodies) there is no confusion. If Wilenski really feels Blake's method was patchy, he cannot deny that Blake was skilful in doing the patching. It seems, to do such patching would require greater skill than portraying one simple pictorial image and letting it go at that.

What one is led to believe about Wilenski is that when an artist fails to imagine proper proportions or recessions he is not a good artist. Wilenski everlastingly praises Vermeer because of his power to bring order and beauty through the use of proper proportion and of recessions. In his recessions, in his orderliness and serenity, Vermeer excelled many other artists. But why should he be a measuring stick for all other artists, who believe and feel as he does or do not feel or believe as he does. There are other ways of portraying beauty! Many a pre-Giotto painter lacked Vermeer's ability in foreshortening but Giotto is to this day considered a great painter. Several Byzantine artists failed to show recessions and correct proportions, but today are none the less great for lacking this ability. Emmanuel's "Cosmos and Damian" is still one of the great pictures people go to Italy to see, yet it possesses no recessions. The Chinese and Japanese art is flat art; it has not the third dimension, yet who would dare to say it has no beauty. Why can not Wilenski see beauty in more than just one type of art?

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Style.

A Simplicity and a Complexity. If we agree that there was beauty in Blake's engravings and that the embellished backgrounds and foregrounds did not distract from the main theme of his picture, we may not be willing to state that he possessed a certain simplicity in the midst of all his embellishment. Yet in many engravings he did. It is Wilenski who claims there must be "simplicity above all else", yet even simplicity may be void of all meaning. Many of Blake's pictures possess a certain complexity, which with a little careful study, are brought within one's understanding - the complexity having been reduced to a minimum. Many of his other pictures possess a grand simplicity. There are "The Infant Jesus Praying"[1], "The Nativity" and "The Ascension"[2] from the Bible Series. There are "Famine"[3] and "Pestilence"[4] from the Plagues of Egypt Series, and "Comus". How simple they are yet how grand! How few lines! How sweeping are Blake's wide long curves! How full of meaning the picture! Here is an absence of embellishment! Here are inspirations of the moment - pictorial images of his own making.

Wilenski in his article in the Apollo Magazine refers to the last ten of Dante's "Divine Comedy" as being the

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1. See picture facing page 39
2. See picture facing page 45
3. See picture facing page 94
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only pictures imaged by Blake as pictorial unities. He says, "These ten are more faithful expressions of Blake's individual pictorial mind than any earlier ones." Has he not seen these of which I have spoken above? Wherein do they fail to possess pictorial unity - they are earlier ones? When these are compared with the ten of the "Divine Comedy" one finds them a great deal more beautiful, with a theme that is much more easily read than the theme in the Dante group. The unity might have been secured in these ten with a simplicity, but the interpretation does not seem to be any more easily or quickly rendered.

Wilenski said that when Blake "rid himself of his portfolios, he had to force his layman's imagination to the point of pictorial form and as a result secured perfection." He secured this perfection before he rid himself of his portfolios. To Wilenski he hadn't secured perfection until he began using recessions and correct proportions. This was the time he chose to do it in the last ten of his "Divine Comedy." He also left out the patchiness (as Wilenski would have it) of backgrounds and foregrounds which detracted from the merit of a picture judged by Wilenski.

Sincerity in the Expression of his Imagination. Wilenski claims that Blake "lacked courage to stop painting at a point when and where his imagination failed him; that he was insincere." Blake may

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have used a variety of figures and objects in his engravings, he may have had an abundance of background but he never tried to make the observer believe his imagination carried him from the central idea into and through all of these details. Blake was most sincere. His reason for not stopping, when his imagination gave him the central idea, was that he felt by embellishing the central idea he would create a more perfect and more beautiful picture. He engraved elaborate details for the joy he had in doing them. When his spirit joined with the Ultimate Being he was so filled with ecstasy he was forced to tell of his experience in as beautiful a way as he could. This expression of joy rendered in the engravings denoted the third step of the Mystic Way - that of Illumination. His spirit had to speak and it spoke in all earnestness and sincerity. In so speaking it sought no material reward nor fame. His spiritual reward was the joy it gave him in doing the engravings.

A Consistency. As there was a great sincerity in Blake's engravings so there was a great consistency in that he never deviated from the one aim he had in mind which was to give to others the joy of spiritual life.

A Rhythm.

In all Blake's engravings there is a rhythm and a balance. There is a balance of form, a balance of figures and objects as set against the backgrounds and there is a

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balanced harmony in color, dainty as it is. Besides rhythm and balance there was a purity. Blake was an idealist who of set purpose kept himself aloof from everything and everybody that would or could remind him of the material world. He kept on his lonely Mystic Way never attempting to make terms with the world. It was this grim determination coupled with the love of the Infinite that was part of the profession of faith that led him to that purity, which was the guiding principle throughout his life, in his poetry, and in his engravings. It might not be an exaggeration to say that he lived his purity.

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The Summary

In the study of William Blake's poetry and engravings an effort has been made to consider the four elements that make the personality of Blake. These four elements are the element of mysticism, the element of romanticism, the element of emotion, and the element of technique. After having analyzed the meaning of mysticism, the first element, and having analyzed its characteristics or stages, I made a study to see what part mysticism played in his poetry and engravings. The various stages that Blake developed in his mysticism I investigated. These various stages were found to have been expressed through a symbolism of his own making, which proved to be an aid in the development of his mysticism.

The second element, romanticism, shows Blake's true love of wonder and adventure, his preoccupation with the picturesque and suggestive aspects of nature, his delight in nature as a background for human and spiritual life, his interest in the older poets and painters, all of which shows him to be a true romanticist. With a keen interest in nature, it is surprising to note an anti-nature tendency in both his poetry and engravings. Even though he goes back into the past for his models in poetry and art, he has a modern tendency in his use of nature that links his name with that of Cézanne and Van Gogh.

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The study of the element of emotion brought out some contrasts in Blake's work. While Blake shows in his engravings the stronger emotions, such as the energetic, the majestic, the terrific, and the sublime, these are not evidenced in his best poems. The softer emotions such as tenderness, pity, sweetness, grace, charm, and beauty are present in his best poems, yet not present to as great a degree in his best engravings. While Blake ignored the feelings of individuals in the society in which he moved, he became bitterly enraged over the injustices that existed in the world at large. His various poems and engravings show this clearly.

A study of the technique of Blake brings out similarities rather than contrasts in his poetry and engravings. When it came to the writing of poetry, Blake trusted to the inspiration of the moment, and he sought above all things to give the impression of verbal images with immediacy. Many of his poems are noted for the rapidity with which the images are flashed before one's eyes. In his engravings, although Blake trusted to inspiration, in order to gain a certain perfection, he labored in recording images. In both his poetry and his engravings a simplicity of manner, a forcefulness, a sincerity, and a consistency in expression exist. Blake used originality in the handling of his metres for his poems just as he used originality in the process of his

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Engravings.

Dante

Divine Comedy, illustrations engraved by William Blake, commissioned by J. Linnell

Milton's

Paradise Lost, illustrations by William Blake, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Adam and Eve Series (Bible), illustrations by William Blake, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Milton's

Comus, illustrations by William Blake, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The engravings were published by the Oxford University Press, London.

The Photographs (which are the larger pictures, - one in color -) were done by the photography department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. (A photograph was taken of the original picture.) The following are photographs:

1. Famine
2. Pestilence
3. Woman Taken in Adultery
4. Ascension
5. David and Goliath

The others are engravings.

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